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NOVELS

OF

SIR EDWARD BULWER LYTTON

Library Edition

NOVELS OF LIFE AND MANNERS

VOL. IX.

ERNEST MALTRAVERS

OR

THE ELEUSINIA

BY

SIR EDWARD BULWER LYTTON, BART.

[9]

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ERNEST MALTRAVERS.



CHAPTER V.

Quid tam dextro pede concipis ut te,
Conatús non pœniteat, votique peracti?—JUV.

“YES,” said De Montaigne, “in my way *I* also am fulfilling my destiny. I am a member of the *Chambre de Députés*, and on a visit to England upon some commercial affairs. I found myself in your neighbourhood, and, of course, could not resist the temptation: so you must receive me as your guest for some days.”

“I congratulate you cordially on your senatorial honours. I have already heard of your rising name.”

“I return the congratulations with equal warmth. You are bringing my prophecies to pass. I have read your works with increased pride at our friendship.”

Maltravers sighed slightly, and half turned away.

“The desire of distinction,” said he after a pause,

* What under such happy auspices do you conceive, that you may not repent of your endeavour and accomplished wish?

“grows upon us till excitement becomes disease. The child who is born with the mariner’s instinct laughs with glee when his paper bark skims the wave of a pool. By-and-by, nothing will content him but the ship and the ocean.—Like the child is the author.”

“I am pleased with your simile,” said De Montaigne, smiling. “Do not spoil it, but go on with your argument.”

Maltravers continued—“Scarcely do we win the applause of a moment, ere we summon the past and conjecture the future. Our contemporaries no longer suffice for competitors, our age for the Court to pronounce on our claims: we call up the Dead as our only true rivals—we appeal to Posterity as our sole just tribunal. Is this vain in us? Possibly. Yet such vanity humbles. ’Tis then only we learn all the difference between Reputation and Fame—between To-day and Immortality!”

“Do you think,” replied De Montaigne, “that the dead did not feel the same, when they first trod the path that leads to the life beyond life? Continue to cultivate the mind, to sharpen by exercise the genius, to attempt to delight or to instruct your race; and even supposing you fall short of every model you set before you—supposing your name moulder with your dust, still you will have passed life more nobly than the unlaborious herd. Grant that you win not that glorious accident, ‘a name below,’ how can you tell but what you may have fitted yourself for high destiny and employ in the world not of men, but of spirits?”

The powers of the mind are things that cannot be less immortal than the mere sense of identity; their acquisitions accompany us through the Eternal Progress; and we may obtain a lower or a higher grade hereafter, in proportion as we are more or less fitted by the exercise of our intellect to comprehend and execute the solemn agencies of God. The wise man is nearer to the angels than the fool is. This may be an apocryphal dogma, but it is not an impossible theory."

"But we may waste the sound enjoyments of actual life in chasing the hope you justly allow to be 'apocryphal;' and our knowledge may go for nothing in the eyes of the Omniscient."

"Very well," said De Montaigne, smiling; "but answer me honestly. By the pursuits of intellectual ambition, *do* you waste the sound enjoyments of life? If so, you do not pursue the system rightly. Those pursuits ought only to quicken your sense for such pleasures as are the true relaxations of life. And this, with you peculiarly, since you are fortunate enough not to depend for subsistence upon literature;—did you do so, I might rather advise you to be a trunk-maker than an author. A man ought not to attempt any of the highest walks of Mind and Art, as the mere provision of daily bread; not literature alone, but everything else of the same degree. He ought not to be a statesman, or an orator, or a philosopher, as a thing of pence and shillings: and usually all men, save the poor poet, feel this truth insensibly."

"This may be fine preaching," said Maltravers;

“but you may be quite sure that the pursuit of literature is a pursuit apart from the ordinary objects of life, and you cannot command the enjoyments of both.”

“I think otherwise,” said De Montaigne, “but it is not in a country-house eighty miles from the capital, without wife, guests, or friends, that the experiment can be fairly made. Come, Maltravers, I see before you a brave career, and I cannot permit you to halt at the onset.”

“You do not see all the calumnies that are already put forth against me, to say nothing of all the assurances (and many by clever men) that there is nothing in me!”

“Dennis was a clever man, and said the same thing of your Pope. Madame de Sévigné was a clever woman, but she thought Racine would never be very famous. Milton saw nothing in the first efforts of Dryden, that made him consider Dryden better than a rhymester. Aristophanes was a good judge of poetry, yet how ill he judged of Euripides! But all this is commonplace, and yet you bring arguments that a commonplace answers in evidence against yourself.”

“But it is unpleasant not to answer attacks—not to retaliate on enemies.”

“Then answer attacks, and retaliate on enemies.”

“But would that be wise?”

“If it give you pleasure—it would not please *me*.”

“Come, De Montaigne, you are reasoning Socratically. I will ask you plainly and bluntly, would you

advise an author to wage war on his literary assailants, or to despise them?"

"Both; let him attack but few, and those rarely. But it is his policy to show that he is one whom it is better not to provoke too far. The author always has the world on his side against the critics, if he choose his opportunity. And he must always recollect that he is 'A STATE' in himself, which must sometimes go to war in order to procure peace. The time for war or for peace must be left to the State's own diplomacy and wisdom."

"You would make us political machines."

"I would make every man's conduct more or less mechanical; for system is the triumph of mind over matter; the just equilibrium of all the powers and passions may seem like machinery. Be it so. Nature meant the world—the creation—man himself, for machines."

"And one must even be in a passion mechanically, according to your theories."

"A man is a poor creature who is not in a passion sometimes; but a very unjust, or a very foolish one, if he be in a passion with the wrong person, and in the wrong place and time. But enough of this, it is growing late."

"And when will Madame visit England?"

"Oh, not yet, I fear. But you will meet Cesarini in London this year or next. He is persuaded that you did not see justice done to his poems, and is coming here as soon as his indolence will let him, to pro-

claim your treachery in a biting preface to some toothless satire."

"Satire!"

"Yes; more than one of your poets made their way by a satire, and Cesarini is persuaded he shall do the same. Castruccio is not as far-sighted as his namesake, the Prince of Lucca. Good-night, my dear Ernest."

CHAPTER VI.

When with much pains this boasted learning's got,
'Tis an affront to those who have it not.

CHURCHILL, *The Author.*

THERE was something in De Montaigne's conversation which, without actual flattery, reconciled Maltravers to himself and his career. It served less, perhaps, to excite than to sober and brace his mind. De Montaigne could have made no man rash, but he could have made many men energetic and persevering. The two friends had some points in common; but Maltravers had far more prodigality of nature and passion about him—had more of flesh and blood, with the faults and excellencies of flesh and blood. De Montaigne held so much to his favourite doctrine of moral equilibrium, that he had really reduced himself, in much, to a species of clockwork. As impulses are formed from habits, so the regularity of De Montaigne's habits made his impulses virtuous and just; and he yielded to them as often as a hasty character might have done; but then those impulses never urged to anything speculative or daring. De Montaigne could not go beyond a certain defined circle of action. He had no sympathy for any reasonings based purely on the hypo-

theses of the imagination : he could not endure Plato, and he was dumb to the eloquent whispers of whatever was refining in poetry or mystical in wisdom.

Maltravers, on the contrary, not disdaining Reason, ever sought to assist her by the Imaginative Faculty, and held all philosophy incomplete and unsatisfactory that bounded its inquiries to the limits of the Known and Certain. He loved the inductive process ; but he carried it out to Conjecture as well as Fact. He maintained that, by a similar hardihood, all the triumphs of science, as well as art, had been accomplished — that Newton, that Copernicus, would have done nothing if they had not imagined as well as reasoned, guessed as well as ascertained. Nay, it was an aphorism with him, that the very soul of philosophy is conjecture. He had the most implicit confidence in the operations of the mind and the heart properly formed, and deemed that the very excesses of emotion and thought, in men well trained by experience and study, are conducive to useful and great ends. But the more advanced years, and the singularly practical character of De Montaigne's views, gave him a superiority in argument over Maltravers, which the last submitted to unwillingly : while, on the other hand, De Montaigne secretly felt that his young friend reasoned from a broader base, and took in a much wider circumference ; and that he was, at once, more liable to failure and error, and more capable of new discovery and of intellectual achievement. But their ways in life being different, they did not clash ; and De Montaigne, who was sincerely inte-

rested in Ernest's fate, was contented to harden his friend's mind against the obstacles in his way, and leave the rest to experiment and to Providence. They went up to London together : and De Montaigne returned to Paris. Maltravers appeared once more in the haunts of the gay and great. He felt that his new character had greatly altered his position. He was no longer courted and caressed for the same vulgar and adventitious circumstances of fortune, birth, and connections, as before—yet for circumstances that to him seemed equally unflattering. He was not sought for his merit, his intellect, his talents ; but for his momentary celebrity. He was an author in fashion, and run after as anything else in fashion might have been. He was invited, less to be talked to than to be stared at. He was far too proud in his temper, and too pure in his ambition, to feel his vanity elated by sharing the enthusiasm of the circles with a German prince or an industrious flea. Accordingly he soon repelled the advances made to him, was reserved and supercilious to fine ladies, refused to be the fashion, and became very unpopular with the literary exclusives. They even began to run down the works, because they were dissatisfied with the author. But Maltravers had based his experiments upon the vast masses of the general Public. He had called the PEOPLE of his own and other countries to be his audience and his judges ; and all the coteries in the world could not have injured him. He was like the member for an immense constituency, who may offend individuals, so long as he

keep his footing with the body at large. But while he withdrew himself from the insipid and the idle, he took care not to become separated from the world. He formed his own society according to his tastes : took pleasure in the manly and exciting topics of the day ; and sharpened his observation and widened his sphere as an author, by mixing freely and boldly with all classes as a citizen. But literature became to him as art to the artist—as his mistress to the lover—an engrossing and passionate delight. He made it his glorious and divine profession—he loved it *as* a profession—he devoted to its pursuits and honours his youth, cares, dreams—his mind, and his heart, and his soul. He was a silent but intense enthusiast in the priesthood he had entered. From LITERATURE he imagined had come all that makes nations enlightened and men humane. And he loved Literature the more, because her distinctions were not those of the world—because she had neither ribbons, nor stars, nor high places at her command. A name in the deep gratitude and hereditary delight of men—this was the title she bestowed. Hers was the Great Primitive Church of the world, without Popes or Muftis—sinecures, pluralities, and hierarchies. Her servants spoke to the earth as the prophets of old, anxious only to be heard and believed. Full of this fanaticism, Ernest Maltravers pursued his way in the great procession of the myrtle-bearers to the sacred shrine. He carried the thyrsus, and he believed in the god. By degrees his fanaticism worked in him the philosophy which De Montaigne would

have derived from sober calculation ; it made him indifferent to the thorns in the path, to the storms in the sky. He learned to despise the enmity he provoked, the calumnies that assailed him. Sometimes he was silent, but sometimes he retorted. Like a soldier who serves a cause, he believed that when the cause was injured in his person, the weapons confided to his hands might be wielded without fear and without reproach. Gradually he became feared as well as known. And while many abused him, none could contemn.

It would not suit the design of this work to follow Maltravers step by step in his course. I am only describing the principal events, not the minute details, of his intellectual life. Of the character of his works it will be enough to say that, whatever their faults, they were original—they were his own. He did not write according to copy, nor compile from commonplace-books. He was an artist, it is true—for what is genius itself but art ? but he took laws, and harmony, and order, from the great code of Truth and Nature ; a code that demands intense and unrelaxing study—though its first principles are few and simple : that study Maltravers did not shrink from. It was a deep love of truth that made him a subtle and searching analyst, even in what the dull world considers trifles ; for he knew that nothing in literature is in itself trifling—that it is often but a hair's breadth that divides a truism from a discovery. He was the more original because he sought rather after the True than the New.

No two minds are ever the same ; and therefore any man who will give us fairly and frankly the results of his own impressions, uninfluenced by the servilities of imitation, will be original. But it was not from originality, which really made his predominant merit, that Maltravers derived his reputation, for his originality was not of that species which generally dazzles the vulgar—it was not extravagant nor *bizarre*—he affected no system and no school. Many authors of his day seemed more novel and *unique* to the superficial. ProFOUND and durable invention proceeds by subtle and fine gradations—it has nothing to do with those jerks and starts, those convulsions and distortions, which belong not to the vigour and health, but to the epilepsy and disease, of Literature.

CHAPTER VII.

Being got out of town, the first thing I did was to give my mule her head.

Gil Blas.

ALTHOUGH the character of Maltravers was gradually becoming more hard and severe — although, as his reason grew more muscular, his imagination lost something of its early bloom, and he was already very different from the wild boy who had set the German youths in a blaze, and had changed into a Castle of Indolence the little cottage, tenanted with Poetry and Alice—he still preserved many of his old habits ; he loved, at frequent intervals, to disappear from the great world—to get rid of books and friends, and luxury and wealth, and make solitary excursions, sometimes on foot, sometimes on horseback, through this fair garden of England.

It was one soft May-day that he found himself on such an expedition, slowly riding through one of the green lanes of —shire. His cloak and his saddlebags comprised all his baggage, and the world was before him “where to choose his place of rest.” The lane wound at length into the main road, and just as he came upon it he fell in with a gay party of equestrians.

Foremost of this cavalcade rode a lady in a dark green habit, mounted on a thorough-bred English horse, which she managed with so easy a grace that Maltravers halted in involuntary admiration. He himself was a consummate horseman, and he had the quick eye of sympathy for those who shared the accomplishment. He thought, as he gazed, that he had never seen but one woman whose air and mien on horseback were so full of that nameless elegance which skill and courage in any art naturally bestow—that woman was Valerie de Ventadour. Presently, to his great surprise, the lady advanced from her companions, neared Maltravers, and said, in a voice which he did not at first distinctly recognise—"Is it possible!—do I see Mr Maltravers?"

She paused a moment, and then threw aside her veil, and Ernest beheld—Valerie de Ventadour! By this time a tall, thin gentleman had joined the French-woman.

"Has *madame* met with an acquaintance?" said he; "and, if so, will she permit me to partake her pleasure?"

The interruption seemed a relief to Valerie; she smiled and coloured.

"Let me introduce you to Mr Maltravers. Mr Maltravers, this is my host, Lord Doningdale."

The two gentlemen bowed, the rest of the cavalcade surrounded the trio, and Lord Doningdale, with a stately, yet frank courtesy, invited Maltravers to return with the party to his house, which was about

four miles distant. As may be supposed, Ernest readily accepted the invitation. The cavalcade proceeded, and Maltravers hastened to seek an explanation from Valerie. It was soon given. Madame de Ventadour had a younger sister, who had lately married a son of Lord Doningdale. The marriage had been solemnised in Paris, and Monsieur and Madame de Ventadour had been in England a week on a visit to the English peer.

The *rencontre* was so sudden and unexpected that neither recovered sufficient self-possession for fluent conversation. The explanation given, Valerie sank into a thoughtful silence, and Maltravers rode by her side equally taciturn, pondering on the strange chance which, after the lapse of years, had thrown them again together.

Lord Doningdale, who at first lingered with his other visitors, now joined them, and Maltravers was struck with his highbred manner, and a singular and somewhat elaborate polish in his emphasis and expression. They soon entered a noble park, which attested far more care and attention than are usually bestowed upon those demesnes, so peculiarly English. Young plantations everywhere contrasted the venerable groves—new cottages of picturesque design adorned the outskirts—and obelisks and columns, copied from the antique, and evidently of recent workmanship, gleamed upon them as they neared the house—a large pile, in which the fashion of Queen Anne's day had been altered into the French roofs and windows of

the architecture of the Tuileries. "You reside much in the country, I am sure, my lord," said Maltravers.

"Yes," replied Lord Doningdale, with a pensive air, "this place is greatly endeared to me. Here his Majesty Louis XVIII., when in England, honoured me with an annual visit. In compliment to him, I sought to model my poor mansion into an humble likeness of his own palace, so that he might as little as possible miss the rights he had lost. His own rooms were furnished exactly like those he had occupied at the Tuileries. Yes, the place is endeared to me—I think of the old times with pride. It is something to have sheltered a Bourbon in his misfortunes."

"It cost *milord* a vast sum to make these alterations," said Madame de Ventadour, glancing archly at Maltravers.

"Ah, yes," said the old lord; and his face, lately elated, became overcast—"nearly three hundred thousand pounds: but what then?—'*Les souvenirs, madame, sont sans prix!*'"

"Have you visited Paris since the restoration, Lord Doningdale?" asked Maltravers.

His lordship looked at him sharply, and then turned his eye to Madame de Ventadour.

"Nay," said Valerie, laughing, "I did not dictate the question."

"Yes," said Lord Doningdale, "I have been at Paris."

"His Majesty must have been delighted to return your lordship's hospitality."

Lord Doningdale looked a little embarrassed, and made no reply, but put his horse into a canter.

“You have galled our host,” said Valerie, smiling. “Louis XVIII. and his friends lived here as long as they pleased, and as sumptuously as they could ; their visits half ruined the owner, who is the model of a *gentilhomme* and *preux chevalier*. He went to Paris to witness their triumph ; he expected, I fancy, the order of the St Esprit. Lord Doningdale has royal blood in his veins. His Majesty asked him once to dinner, and when he took leave, said to him, ‘We are happy, Lord Doningdale, to have *thus* requited our obligations to your lordship.’ Lord Doningdale went back in dudgeon, yet he still boasts of his *souvenirs*, poor man.”

“Princes are not grateful, neither are republics,” said Maltravers.

“Ah ! who is grateful,” rejoined Valerie, “except a dog and a woman ?”

Maltravers found himself ushered into a vast dressing-room, and was informed by a French valet, that, in the country, Lord Doningdale dined at six—the first bell would ring in a few minutes. While the valet was speaking, Lord Doningdale himself entered the room. His lordship had learned, in the meanwhile, that Maltravers was of the great and ancient commoner’s house, whose honours were centred in his brother ; and yet more, that he was the Mr Maltravers whose writings every one talked of, whether

for praise or abuse. Lord Doningdale had the two characteristics of a highbred gentleman of the old school—respect for birth and respect for talent; he was, therefore, more than ordinarily courteous to Ernest, and pressed him to stay some days with so much cordiality, that Maltravers could not but assent. His travelling toilet was scanty; but Maltravers thought little of dress.

CHAPTER VIII.

It is the soul that sees. The outward eyes
Present the object, but the mind descries ;
And thence delight, disgust, or cool indifference rise.

CRABBE.

WHEN Maltravers entered the enormous saloon, hung with damask, and decorated with the ponderous enrichments and furniture of the time of Louis XIV. (that most showy and barbarous of all tastes, which has nothing in it of the graceful, nothing of the picturesque, and which, nowadays, people who should know better imitate with a ludicrous servility), he found sixteen persons assembled. His host stepped up from a circle which surrounded him, and formally presented his new visitor to the rest. He was struck with the likeness which the sister of Valerie bore to Valerie herself ; but it was a sobered and chastened likeness—less handsome, less impressive. Mrs George Herbert—such was the name she now owned—was a pretty, shrinking, timid girl, fond of her husband, and mightily awed by her father-in-law. Maltravers sat by her, and drew her into conversation. He could not help pitying the poor lady, when he found she was to live altogether at Doningdale Park—remote from all

the friends and habits of her childhood—alone, so far as the affections were concerned, with a young husband, who was passionately fond of field-sports, and who, from the few words Ernest exchanged with him, seemed to have only three ideas—his dogs, his horses, and his wife. Alas! the last would soon be the least in importance. It is a sad position—that of a lively young Frenchwoman, entombed in an English country-house! Marriages with foreigners are seldom fortunate experiments! But Ernest's attention was soon diverted from the sister by the entrance of Valerie herself, leaning on her husband's arm. Hitherto he had not very minutely observed what change time had effected in her—perhaps he was half afraid. He now gazed at her with curious interest. Valerie was still extremely handsome, but her face had grown sharper, her form thinner and more angular; there was something in her eye and lip, discontented, restless, almost querulous:—such is the too common expression in the face of those born to love, and condemned to be indifferent. The little sister was more to be envied of the two—come what may, she loved her husband, such as he was, and her heart might ache, but it was not with a void.

Monsieur de Ventadour soon shuffled up to Maltravers—his nose longer than ever.

“Hein—hein—how d'ye do—how d'ye do?—charmed to see you—saw madame before me—hein—hein—I suspect—I suspect——”

“Mr Maltravers, will you give Madame de Venta-

dour your arm?" said Lord Doningdale, as he stalked on to the dining-room with a duchess on his own.

"And you have left Naples," said Maltravers: "left it for good?"

"We do not think of returning."

"It was a charming place—how I loved it!—how well I remember it!" Ernest spoke calmly—it was but a general remark.

Valerie sighed gently.

During dinner, the conversation between Maltravers and Madame de Ventadour was vague and embarrassed. Ernest was no longer in love with her—he had outgrown that youthful fancy. She had exercised influence over him—the new influences that he had created, had chased away her image. Such is life. Long absences extinguish all the false lights, though not the true ones. The lamps are dead in the banquet-room of yesterday; but a thousand years hence, and the stars we look on to-night will burn as brightly. Maltravers was no longer in love with Valerie. But Valerie—ah, perhaps *hers* had been true love!

Maltravers was surprised when he came to examine the state of his own feelings—he was surprised to find that his pulse did not beat quicker at the touch of one whose very glance had once thrilled him to the soul—he was surprised, but rejoiced. He was no longer anxious to seek but to shun excitement, and he was a better and a higher being than he had been on the shores of Naples.

CHAPTER IX.

Whence that low voice, a whisper from the heart,
That told of days long past?—WORDSWORTH.

ERNEST stayed several days at Lord Doningdale's, and every day he rode out with Valerie, but it was with a large party; and every evening he conversed with her, but the whole world might have overheard what they said. In fact, the sympathy that had once existed between the young dreamer and the proud, discontented woman, had in much passed away. Awakened to vast and grand objects, Maltravers was a dreamer no more. Inured to the life of trifles she had once loathed, Valerie had settled down into the usages and thoughts of the common world—she had no longer the superiority of earthly wisdom over Maltravers, and his romance was sobered in its eloquence, and her ear dulled to its tone. Still Ernest felt a deep interest in her, and still she seemed to feel a sensitive pride in his career.

One evening Maltravers had joined a circle in which Madame de Ventadour, with more than her usual animation, presided—and to which, in her pretty, womanly, and thoroughly French way, she was lightly laying down the law on a hundred subjects—Philosophy, Poetry, Sévres china, and the Balance of Power in

Europe. Ernest listened to her, delighted, but not enchanted. Yet Valerie was not natural that night—she was speaking from forced spirits.

“Well,” said Madame de Ventadour, at last, tired, perhaps, of the part she had been playing, and bringing to a sudden close an animated description of the then French court—“well, see now if we ought not to be ashamed of ourselves—our talk has positively interrupted the music. Did you see Lord Doningdale stop it with a bow to me, as much as to say, with his courtly reproof,—‘It shall not disturb you, madam?’ I will no longer be accessory to your crime of bad taste!”

With this the Frenchwoman rose, and, gliding through the circle, retired to the further end of the room. Ernest followed her with his eyes. Suddenly she beckoned to him, and he approached and seated himself by her side.

“Mr Maltravers,” said Valerie, then, with great sweetness in her voice, “I have not yet expressed to you the delight I have felt from your genius. In absence you have suffered me to converse with you—your books have been to me dear friends; as we shall soon part again, let me now tell you of this, frankly and without compliment.”

This paved the way to a conversation that approached more on the precincts of the past than any they had yet known. But Ernest was guarded, and Valerie watched his words and looks with an interest she could not conceal—an interest that partook of disappointment.

“It is an excitement,” said Valerie, “to climb a

mountain, though it fatigue ; and though the clouds may even deny us a prospect from its summit, it is an excitement that gives a very universal pleasure, and that seems almost as if it were the result of a common human instinct, which makes us desire to rise—to get above the ordinary thoroughfares and level of life. Some such pleasure you must have in intellectual ambition, in which the mind is the upward traveller.”

“It is not the *ambition* that pleases,” replied Maltravers, “it is the following a path congenial to our tastes, and made dear to us in a short time by habit. The moments in which we look beyond our work, and fancy ourselves seated beneath the Everlasting Laurel, are few. It is the work itself, whether of action or literature, that interests and excites us. And at length the dryness of toil takes the familiar sweetness of custom. But in intellectual labour there is another charm—we become more intimate with our own nature. The heart and the soul grow friends, as it were, and the affections and aspirations unite. Thus we are never without society—we are never alone ; all that we have read, learned, and discovered, is company to us. This is pleasant,” added Maltravers, “to those who have no dear connections in the world without.”

“And is that your case ?” asked Valerie, with a timid smile.

“Alas, yes ! and since I conquered one affection, Madame de Ventadour, I almost think I have outlived the capacity of loving. I believe that when we cultivate very largely the reason or the imagination, we

blunt, to a certain extent, our young susceptibilities to the fair impressions of real life. From 'idleness,' says the old Roman poet, 'Love feeds his torch.'"

"You are too young to talk thus."

"I speak as I feel."

Valerie said no more.

Shortly afterwards Lord Doningdale approached them, and proposed that they should make an excursion the next day to see the ruins of an old abbey, some few miles distant.

CHAPTER X.

If I should meet thee
After long years,
How shall I greet thee?—BYRON.

IT was a smaller party than usual the next day, consisting only of Lord Doningdale, his son George Herbert, Valerie, and Ernest. They were returning from the ruins, and the sun, now gradually approaching the west, threw its slant rays over the gardens and houses of a small, picturesque town, or, perhaps, rather village, on the high North Road. It is one of the prettiest places in England, that town or village, and boasts an excellent old-fashioned inn, with a large and quaint pleasure-garden. It was through the long and straggling street that our little party slowly rode, when the sky became suddenly overcast, and a few large hailstones falling, gave notice of an approaching storm.

“I told you we should not get safely through the day,” said George Herbert. “Now we are in for it.”

“George, that is a vulgar expression,” said Lord Doningdale, buttoning up his coat. While he spoke, a vivid flash of lightning darted across their very path, and the sky grew darker and darker.

“We may as well rest at the inn,” said Maltravers; “the storm is coming on apace, and Madame de Ventadour——”

“You are right,” interrupted Lord Doningdale; and he put his horse into a canter.

They were soon at the door of the old hotel. Bells rang—dogs barked—ostlers ran. A plain, dark, travelling post-chariot was before the inn-door; and, roused perhaps by the noise below, a lady in the “first floor front, No. 2,” came to the window. This lady owned the travelling-carriage, and was at this time alone in that apartment. As she looked carelessly at the party, her eyes rested on one form—she turned pale, uttered a faint cry, and fell senseless on the floor.

Meanwhile, Lord Doningdale and his guests were shown into the room next to that tenanted by the lady. Properly speaking, both the rooms made one long apartment for balls and county meetings, and the division was formed by a thin partition, removable at pleasure. The hail now came on fast and heavy, the trees groaned, the thunder roared; and in the large, dreary room there was a palpable and oppressive sense of coldness and discomfort. Valerie shivered—a fire was lighted—and the Frenchwoman drew near to it.

“You are wet, my dear lady,” said Lord Doningdale. “You should take off that close habit, and have it dried.”

“On, no; what matters it?” said Valerie, bitterly, and almost rudely.

“It matters everything,” said Ernest; “pray be ruled.”

“And do you care for me?” murmured Valerie.

“Can you ask that question?” replied Ernest, in the same tone, and with affectionate and friendly warmth.

Meanwhile, the good old lord had summoned the chambermaid, and, with the kindly imperiousness of a father, made Valerie quit the room. The three gentlemen, left together, talked of the storm, wondered how long it would last, and debated the propriety of sending to Doningdale for the carriage. While they spoke, the hail suddenly ceased, though clouds in the distant horizon were bearing heavily up to renew the charge. George Herbert, who was the most impatient of mortals, especially of rainy weather in a strange place, seized the occasion, and insisted on riding to Doningdale, and sending back the carriage.

“Surely a groom would do as well, George,” said the father.

“My dear father, no; I should envy the rogue too much. I am bored to death here. Marie will be frightened about us. Brown Bess will take me back in twenty minutes. I am a hardy fellow, you know. Good-bye.”

Away darted the young sportsman, and in two minutes they saw him spur gaily from the inn-door.

“It is very odd that *I* should have such a son,” said Lord Doningdale, musingly—“a son who cannot amuse himself indoors for two minutes together. I took great pains with his education, too. Strange that people should weary so much of themselves that they cannot brave the prospect of a few minutes passed in reflection

—that a shower and the resources of their own thoughts are evils so galling—very strange indeed. But it is a confounded climate this, certainly. I wonder when it will clear up.”

Thus muttering, Lord Doningdale walked, or rather marched, to and fro the room, with his hands in his coat pockets, and his whip sticking perpendicularly out of the right one. Just at this moment the waiter came to announce that his lordship's groom was without, and desired much to see him. Lord Doningdale had then the pleasure of learning that his favourite grey hackney, which he had ridden winter and summer, for fifteen years, was taken with shivers, and, as the groom expressed it, seemed to have “the collar” (cholera?) “in its bowels!”

Lord Doningdale turned pale, and hurried to the stables without saying a word.

Maltravers, who, plunged in thought, had not overheard the low and brief conference between master and groom, remained alone, seated by the fire, his head buried in his bosom, and his arms folded.

Meanwhile, the lady who occupied the adjoining chamber had recovered slowly from her swoon. She put both hands to her temples, as if trying to recollect her thoughts. Hers was a fair, innocent, almost childish face; and now, as a smile shot across it, there was something so sweet and touching in the gladness it shed over that countenance, that you could not have seen it without strong and almost painful interest. For it was the gladness of a person who has known sorrow. Sud-

denly she started up, and said—"No—then! I do not dream. He is come back—he is here—all will be well again! Ha! it is his voice. Oh, bless him, it is *his* voice!" She paused, her finger on her lip, her face bent down. A low and indistinct sound of voices reached her straining ear through the thin door that divided her from Maltravers. She listened intently, but she could not overhear the import. Her heart beat violently. "He is not alone!" she murmured, mournfully. "I will wait till the sound ceases, and then I will venture in!"

And what was the conversation carried on in that chamber? We must return to Ernest. He was sitting in the same thoughtful posture when Madame de Ventadour returned. The Frenchwoman coloured when she found herself alone with Ernest, and Ernest himself was not at his ease.

"Herbert has gone home to order the carriage, and Lord Doningdale has disappeared, I scarce know whither. You do not, I trust, feel the worse for the rain?"

"No," said Valerie.

"Shall you have any commands in London?" asked Maltravers; "I return to town to-morrow."

"So soon!" and Valerie sighed. "Ah!" she added, after a pause, "we shall not meet again for years perhaps. Monsieur de Ventadour is to be appointed ambassador to the — Court—and so—and so—. Well, it is no matter. What has become of the friendship we once swore to each other?"

“It is here,” said Maltravers, laying his hand on his heart. “Here at least, lies the half of that friendship which was my charge ; and more than friendship, Valerie de Ventadour — respect — admiration—gratitude. At a time of life, when passion and fancy, most strong, might have left me an idle and worthless voluptuary, you convinced me that the world has virtue, and that woman is too noble to be our toy—the idol of to-day, the victim of to-morrow. Your influence, Valerie, left me a more thoughtful man—I hope a better one.”

“Oh!” said Madame de Ventadour, strongly affected ; “I bless you for what you tell me : you cannot know—you cannot guess how sweet it is to me. Now I recognise you once more. What—what did my resolution cost me ! Now I am repaid !”

Ernest was moved by her emotion, and by his own remembrances ; he took her hand, and pressing it with frank and respectful tenderness—“I did not think, Valerie,” said he, “when I reviewed the past, I did not think that you loved me—I was not vain enough for that ; but, if so, how much is your character raised in my eyes—how provident, how wise your virtue ! Happier and better for both, our present feelings, each to each, than if we had indulged a brief and guilty dream of passion, at war with all that leaves passion without remorse, and bliss without alloy. Now——”

“Now,” interrupted Valerie, quickly, and fixing on him her dark eyes—“now you love me no longer !

Yet it is better so. Well, I will go back to my cold and cheerless state of life, and forget once more that Heaven endowed me with a heart !”

“ Ah, Valerie ! esteemed, revered, still beloved, not indeed with the fires of old, but with a deep, undying, and holy tenderness, speak not thus to me. Let me not believe you unhappy ; let me think that, wise, sagacious, brilliant as you are, you have employed your gifts to reconcile yourself to a common lot. Still let me look up to you when I would despise the circles in which you live, and say,—‘ On that pedestal an altar is yet placed, to which the heart may bring the offerings of the soul.’ ”

“ It is in vain—in vain that I struggle,” said Valerie, half-choked with emotion, and clasping her hands passionately. “ Ernest, I love you still—I am wretched to think you love me no more ; I would give you nothing—yet I exact all ; my youth is going—my beauty dimmed—my very intellect is dulled by the life I lead ; and yet I ask from you that which your young heart once felt for me. Despise me, Maltravers, I am not what I seemed—I am a hypocrite—despise me.”

“ No,” said Ernest, again possessing himself of her hand, and falling on his knee by her side. “ No, never to be forgotten, ever to be honoured Valerie, hear me.” As he spoke, he kissed the hand he held ; with the other, Valerie covered her face and wept bitterly, but in silence. Ernest paused till the burst of her feelings had subsided, her hand still in his—still warmed by

his kisses—kisses as pure as cavalier ever impressed on the hand of his queen.

At this time, the door communicating with the next room gently opened. A fair form—a form fairer and younger than that of Valerie de Ventadour, entered the apartment; the silence had deceived her—she believed that Maltravers was alone. She had entered with her heart upon her lips; love, sanguine, hopeful love, in every vein, in every thought—she had entered, dreaming that across that threshold life would dawn upon her afresh—that all would be once more as it had been, when the common air was rapture. Thus she entered; and now she stood spell-bound, terror-stricken, pale as death—life turned to stone—youth—hope—bliss were for ever over to her! Ernest kneeling to another was all she saw!—For this had she been faithful and true, amidst storm and desolation; for this had she hoped—dreamed—lived. They did not note her; she was unseen—unheard. And Ernest, who would have gone barefoot to the end of the earth to find her, was in the very room with her, and knew it not!

“Call me again *beloved!*” said Valerie, very softly.

“Beloved Valerie, hear me.”

These words were enough for the listener; she turned noiselessly away; humble as that heart was, it was proud. The door closed on her—she had obtained the wish of her whole being—Heaven had heard her prayer—she had once more seen the lover of her youth; and thenceforth all was night and darkness to

her. What matter what became of her? One moment, what an effect it produces upon years!—ONE MOMENT!—virtue, crime, glory, shame, woe, rapture, rest upon moments! Death itself is but a moment, yet Eternity is its successor!

“Hear me!” continued Ernest, unconscious of what had passed—“hear me; let us be what human nature and worldly forms seldom allow those of opposite sexes to be—friends to each other, and to virtue also—friends through time and absence—friends through all the vicissitudes of life—friends on whose affection shame and remorse never cast a shade—friends who are to meet hereafter! Oh! there is no attachment so true, no tie so holy, as that which is founded on the old chivalry of loyalty and honour; and which is what love would be, if the heart and the soul were unadulterated by clay.”

There was in Ernest’s countenance an expression so noble, in his voice a tone so thrilling, that Valerie was brought back at once to the nature which a momentary weakness had subdued. She looked at him with an admiring and grateful gaze, and then said, in a calm but low voice, “Ernest, I understand you; yes, your friendship is dearer to me than love.”

At this time they heard the voice of Lord Doningdale on the stairs. Valerie turned away. Maltravers, as he rose, extended his hand; she pressed it warmly, and the spell was broken, the temptation conquered, the ordeal passed. While Lord Doningdale entered the room, the carriage, with Herbert in it, drove to the

door. In a few minutes the little party were within the vehicle. As they drove away, the ostlers were harnessing the horses to the dark-green travelling carriage. From the window, a sad and straining eye gazed upon the gayer equipage of the peer—that eye which Maltravers would have given his whole fortune to meet again. But he did not look up; and Alice Darvil turned away, and her fate was fixed!

CHAPTER XI.

Strange fits of passion I have known,
And I will dare to tell.—WORDSWORTH.

The food of hope
Is meditated action.—WORDSWORTH.

MALTRAVERS left Doningdale the next day. He had no further conversation with Valerie; but when he took leave of her, she placed in his hand a letter, which he read as he rode slowly through the beech avenues of the park. Translated, it ran thus:—

“Others would despise me for the weakness I showed—but you will not! It is the sole weakness of a life. None can know what I have passed through—what hours of dejection and gloom—I, whom so many envy! Better to have been a peasant girl, with love, than a queen whose life is but a dull mechanism. You, Maltravers, I never forgot in absence; and your image made yet more wearisome and trite the things around me. Years passed, and your name was suddenly in men’s lips. I heard of you wherever I went—I could not shut you from me. Your fame was as if you were conversing by my side. We met at last,

suddenly and unexpectedly. I saw that you loved me no more, and that thought conquered all my resolves : anguish subdues the nerves of the mind as sickness those of the body. And thus I forgot, and humbled, and might have undone myself. Juster and better thoughts are once more awakened within me, and when we meet again I shall be worthy of your respect. I see how dangerous are that luxury of thought, that sin of discontent, which I indulged. I go back to life resolved to vanquish all that can interfere with its claims and duties. Heaven guide and preserve you, Ernest. Think of me as one whom you will not blush to have loved—whom you will not blush hereafter to present to your wife. With so much that is soft as well as great within you, you were not formed like me—to be alone.—Farewell !”

Maltravers read and re-read this letter ; and when he reached his home, he placed it carefully amongst the things he most valued. A lock of Alice’s hair lay beside it—he did not think that either was dishonoured by the contact.

With an effort, he turned himself once more to those stern yet high connections which literature makes with real life. Perhaps there was a certain restlessness in his heart which induced him ever to occupy his mind. That was one of the busiest years of his life—the one in which he did most to sharpen jealousy and confirm fame.

CHAPTER XII.

In effect he entered my apartment.—*Gil Blas.*

I am surprised, said he, at the caprice of fortune, who sometimes delights in loading an execrable author with favours, whilst she leaves good writers to perish for want.—*Gil Blas.*

It was just twelve months after his last interview with Valerie, and Madame de Ventadour had long since quitted England, when one morning, as Maltravers sat alone in his study, Castruccio Cesarini was announced.

“ Ah, my dear Castruccio, how are you ? ” cried Maltravers, eagerly, as the opening door presented the form of the Italian.

“ Sir,” said Castruccio, with great stiffness, and speaking in French, which was his wont when he meant to be distant—“ sir, I do not come to renew our former acquaintance—you are a great man ” (here a bitter sneer), “ I an obscure one ” (here Castruccio drew himself up)—“ I only come to discharge a debt to you which I find I have incurred.”

“ What tone is this, Castruccio ? and what debt do you speak of ? ”

“ On my arrival in town yesterday,” said the poet, solemnly, “ I went to the man whom you deputed

some years since to publish my little volume, to demand an account of its success ; and I found that it had cost one hundred and twenty pounds, deducting the sale of forty-nine copies which had been sold. *Your* books sell some thousands, I am told. It is well contrived—mine fell still-born, no pains were taken with it—no matter” (a wave of the hand). “You discharged this debt, I repay you : there is a check for the money. Sir, I have done ! I wish you a good day, and health to enjoy *your* reputation.”

“ Why, Cesarini, this is folly.”

“ Sir——”

“ Yes, it is folly ; for there is no folly equal to that of throwing away friendship in a world where friendship is so rare. You insinuate that I am to blame for any neglect which your work experienced. Your publisher can tell you that I was more anxious about your book than I have ever been about my own.”

“ And the proof is, that forty-nine copies were sold.”

“ Sit down, Castruccio ; sit down, and listen to reason ;” and Maltravers proceeded to explain, and soothe, and console. He reminded the poor poet that his verses were written in a foreign tongue—that even English poets of great fame enjoyed but a limited sale for their works—that it was impossible to make the avaricious public purchase what the stupid public would not take an interest in—in short, he used all those arguments which naturally suggested themselves as best calculated to convince and soften Castruccio : and he did this with so much evident sympathy and kindness, that at length

the Italian could no longer justify his own resentment. A reconciliation took place, sincere on the part of Maltravers, hollow on the part of Cesarini; for the disappointed author could not forgive the successful one.

“And how long shall you stay in London?”

“Some months.”

“Send for your luggage, and be my guest.”

“No; I have taken lodgings that suit me. I am formed for solitude.”

“While you stay here, you will, however, go into the world.”

“Yes, I have some letters of introduction, and I hear that the English can honour merit, even in an Italian.”

“You hear the truth, and it will amuse you, at least, to see our eminent men. They will receive you most hospitably. Let me assist you as a cicerone.”

“Oh, your *valuable* time!”

“Is at your disposal; but where are you going?”

“It is Sunday, and I have had my curiosity excited to hear a celebrated preacher, Mr —, who, they tell me, is now more talked of than *any author* in London.”

“They tell you truly—I will go with you—I myself have not yet heard him, but proposed to do so this very day.”

“Are you not jealous of a man so much spoken of?”

“Jealous! why, I never set up for a popular preacher!—*ce n'est pas mon métier.*”

“ If I were a *successful* author, I should be jealous if the dancing-dogs were talked of.”

“ No, my dear Cesarini, I am sure you would not. You are a little irritated at present by natural disappointment ; but the man who has as much success as he deserves is never morbidly jealous, even of a rival in his own line : want of success sours us ; but a little sunshine smiles away the vapours. Come, we have no time to lose.”

Maltravers took his hat, and the two young men bent their way to —— Chapel. Cesarini still retained the singular fashion of his dress, though it was now made of handsomer materials, and worn with more coxcombry and pretension. He had much improved in person—had been admired in Paris, and told that he looked like a man of genius ; and, with his black ringlets flowing over his shoulders, his long mustache, his broad Spanish-shaped hat, and eccentric garb, he certainly did not look like other people. He smiled with contempt at the plain dress of his companion. “ I see,” said he, “ that you follow the fashion, and look as if you passed your life with *élégans* instead of students. I wonder you condescend to such trifles as fashionably-shaped hats and coats.”

“ It would be worse trifling to set up for originality in hats and coats, at least in sober England. I was born a gentleman, and I dress my outward frame like others of my order. Because I am a writer, why should I affect to be different from other men ? ”

“ I see that you are not above the weakness of your

countryman, Congreve," said Cesarini, "who deemed it finer to be a gentleman than an author."

"I always thought that anecdote misconstrued. Congreve had a proper and manly pride, to my judgment, when he expressed a dislike to be visited merely as a raree-show."

"But is it policy to let the world see that an author is like other people? Would he not create a deeper personal interest if he showed that even in person alone he was unlike the herd? He ought to be seen seldom—not to stale his presence—and to resort to the arts that belong to the royalty of intellect as well as the royalty of birth."

"I daresay an author, by a little charlatanism of that nature, might be more talked of—might be more adored in the boarding-schools, and make a better picture in the exhibition. But I think, if his mind be manly, he would lose in self-respect at every quackery of the sort. And my philosophy is, that to respect one's self is worth all the fame in the world."

Cesarini sneered and shrugged his shoulders; it was quite evident that the two authors had no sympathy with each other.

They arrived at last at the chapel, and with some difficulty procured seats.

Presently the service began. The preacher was a man of unquestionable talent and fervid eloquence; but his theatrical arts, his affected dress, his artificial tones and gestures, and, above all, the fanatical mummeries which he introduced into the House of God,

disgusted Maltravers, while they charmed, entranced, and awed Cesarini. The one saw a mountebank and impostor—the other recognised a profound artist and an inspired prophet.

But while the discourse was drawing towards a close, while the preacher was in one of his most eloquent bursts—the ohs ! and ahs ! of which were the grand prelude to the pathetic peroration—the dim outline of a female form, in the distance, riveted the eyes and absorbed the thoughts of Maltravers. The chapel was darkened, though it was broad daylight ; and the face of the person that attracted Ernest's attention was concealed by her head-dress and veil. But that bend of the neck, so simply graceful, so humbly modest, recalled to his heart but one image. Every one has, perhaps, observed that there is a physiognomy (if the bull may be pardoned) of *form* as well as face, which it rarely happens that two persons possess in common. And this, with most, is peculiarly marked in the turn of the head, the outline of the shoulders, and the ineffable something that characterises the postures of each individual in repose. The more intently he gazed, the more firmly Ernest was persuaded that he saw before him the long-lost, the never-to-be-forgotten mistress of his boyish days, and his first love. On one side of the lady in question sat an elderly gentleman, whose eyes were fixed upon the preacher ; on the other, a beautiful little girl, with long fair ringlets, and that cast of features which, from its exquisite delicacy and expressive mildness, painters and poets call the "angelic."

These persons appeared to belong to the same party. Maltravers literally trembled, so great were his impatience and agitation. Yet still, the dress of the supposed likeness of Alice, the appearance of her companions, were so evidently above the ordinary rank, that Ernest scarcely ventured to yield to the suggestions of his own heart. Was it possible that the daughter of Luke Darvil, thrown upon the wide world, could have risen so far beyond her circumstances and station? At length the moment came when he might resolve his doubts; the discourse was concluded—the extemporaneous prayer was at an end—the congregation broke up, and Maltravers pushed his way, as well as he could, through the dense and serried crowd. But every moment some vexatious obstruction, in the shape of a fat gentleman or three close-wedged ladies, intercepted his progress. He lost sight of the party in question amidst the profusion of tall bonnets and waving plumes. He arrived at last, breathless and pale as death (so great was the struggle within him), at the door of the chapel. He arrived in time to see a plain carriage with servants in grey undress liveries, driving from the porch—and caught a glimpse within the vehicle of the golden ringlets of a child. He darted forward, he threw himself almost before the horses. The coachman drew in, and with an angry exclamation, very much like an oath, whipped his horses aside and went off. But that momentary pause sufficed.—“It is she—it is! O Heaven, it is Alice!” murmured Maltravers. The

whole place reeled before his eyes, and he clung, overpowered and unconscious, to a neighbouring lamp-post for support. But he recovered himself with an agonising effort, as the thought struck upon his heart, that he was about to lose sight of her again for ever. And he rushed forward, like one frantic, in pursuit of the carriage. But there was a vast crowd of other carriages, besides stream upon stream of foot-passengers—for the great and the gay resorted to that place of worship, as a fashionable excitement in a dull day. And after a weary and a dangerous chase, in which he had been nearly run over three times, Maltravers halted at last, exhausted and in despair. Every succeeding Sunday, for months, he went to the same chapel, but in vain ; in vain, too, he resorted to every public haunt of dissipation and amusement. Alice Darvil he beheld no more !

CHAPTER XIII.

Tell me, sir,
Have you cast up your state, rated your land,
And find it able to endure the charge?

The Noble Gentleman.

By degrees, as Maltravers sobered down from the first shock of that unexpected meeting, and from the prolonged disappointment that followed it, he became sensible of a strange kind of happiness or contentment. Alice was not in poverty, she was not eating the unhallowed bread of vice, or earning the bitter wages of laborious penury. He saw her in reputable, nay, opulent circumstances. A dark nightmare, that had often, amidst the pleasures of youth, or the triumphs of literature, weighed upon his breast, was removed. He breathed more freely—he could sleep in peace. His conscience could no longer say to him, “She who slept upon thy bosom is a wanderer upon the face of the earth—exposed to every temptation, perishing perhaps for want.” That single sight of Alice had been like the apparition of the injured Dead conjured up at Heraclea—whose sight could pacify the aggressor and exorcise the spectres of remorse. He was reconciled with himself, and walked on to the Future with a bolder step and a statelier crest. Was she married to that staid

and sober-looking personage whom he had beheld with her? was that child the offspring of their union? He almost hoped so—it was better to lose than to destroy her. Poor Alice! could she have dreamed, when she sat at his feet gazing up into his eyes, that a time would come when Maltravers would thank Heaven for the belief that she was happy with another?

Ernest Maltravers now felt a new man: the relief of conscience operated on the efforts of his genius. A more buoyant and elastic spirit entered into them—they seemed to breathe as with a second youth.

Meanwhile Cesarini threw himself into the fashionable world, and to his own surprise was *fêted* and carressed. In fact, Castruccio was exactly the sort of person to be made a lion of. The letters of introduction that he had brought from Paris were addressed to those great personages in England, between whom and personages equally great in France, politics makes a bridge of connection. Cesarini appeared to them as an accomplished young man, brother-in-law to a distinguished member of the French Chamber. Maltravers, on the other hand, introduced him to the literary dilettanti, who admire all authors that are not rivals. The singular costume of Cesarini, which would have revolted persons in an Englishman, enchanted them in an Italian. He looked, they said, like a poet. Ladies like to have verses written to them—and Cesarini, who talked very little, made up for it by scribbling eternally. The young man's head soon grew filled with comparisons between himself in London and

Petrarch at Avignon. As he had always thought that fame was in the gift of lords and ladies, and had no idea of the multitude, he fancied himself already famous. And, since one of his strongest feelings was his jealousy of Maltravers, he was delighted at being told he was a much more interesting creature than that haughty personage, who wore his neckcloth like other people, and had not even those indispensable attributes of genius—black curls and a sneer. Fine society, which, as Madame de Staël well says, depraves the frivolous mind and braces the strong one, completed the ruin of all that was manly in Cesarini's intellect. He soon learned to limit his desire of effect or distinction to gilded saloons ; and his vanity contented itself upon the scraps and morsels from which the lion heart of true ambition turns in disdain. But this was not all. Cesarini was envious of the greater affluence of Maltravers. His own fortune was in a small capital of eight or nine thousand pounds ; but, thrown in the midst of the wealthiest society in Europe, he could not bear to sacrifice a single claim upon its esteem. He began to talk of the satiety of wealth, and young ladies listened to him with remarkable interest when he did so—he obtained the reputation of riches—he was too vain not to be charmed with it. He endeavoured to maintain the claim by adopting the extravagant excesses of the day. He bought horses—he gave away jewels—he made love to a marchioness of forty-two, who was very kind to him and very fond of *écarté*—he gambled—he was in the high-road to destruction.

BOOK VI.

Εἶποις ἂν, ὡς ὁ χρυσοῦς ἐκ νικᾶ τάδε
Πλουτεῖν τε τερπνόν.—EURIP. *Ion.*, line 641.

Perchance you say that gold's the arch-exceller,
And to be rich is sweet?

Κεῖνο δ' οὐκ ἀνασχετόν
Εἴκειν ὁδοῦ χαλῶντα τοῖς κακίοισιν.—*Ibid.*, line 648.

'Tis not to be endured,
To yield our trodden path and turn aside,
Giving our place to knaves.

BOOK VI.

CHAPTER I.

L'adresse et l'artifice ont passé dans mon cœur,
Qu'on a sous cet habit et d'esprit et de ruse.*—REGNARD.

It was a fine morning in July, when a gentleman who had arrived in town the night before—after an absence from England of several years—walked slowly and musingly up that superb thoroughfare which connects the Regent's Park with St James's.

He was a man, who, with great powers of mind, had wasted his youth in a wandering vagabond kind of life, but who had worn away the love of pleasure, and begun to awaken to a sense of ambition.

“It is astonishing how this city is improved,” said he to himself. “Everything gets on in this world with a little energy and bustle—and everybody as well as everything. My old cronies, fellows not half so clever as I am, are all doing well. There's Tom Stevens, my very fag at Eton—snivelling little dog he

* Subtlety and craft have taken possession of my heart, but under this habit one exhibits both shrewdness and wit.

was too !—just made under-secretary of state. Pearson, whose longs and shorts I always wrote, is now head-master to the human longs and shorts of a public school—editing Greek plays, and booked for a bishopric. Collier, I see by the papers, is leading his circuit—and Ernest Maltravers (but *he* had some talent !) has made a name in the world. Here am I, worth them all put together, who have done nothing but spend half my little fortune in spite of all my economy. Egad, this must have an end. I must look to the main chance ; and yet, just when I want his help the most, my worthy uncle thinks fit to marry again. Humph ! I'm too good for this world."

While thus musing, the soliloquist came in direct personal contact with a tall gentleman, who carried his head very high in the air, and did not appear to see that he had nearly thrown our abstracted philosopher off his legs.

"Zounds, sir, what do you mean ?" cried the latter.

"I beg your par——" began the other, meekly, when his arm was seized, and the injured man exclaimed, "Bless me, sir, is it indeed *you* whom I see ?"

"Ha !—Lumley ?"

"The same ; and how fares it, my dear uncle ? I did not know you were in London. I only arrived last night. How well you are looking !"

"Why, yes, Heaven be praised, I am pretty well."

"And happy in your new ties ? You must present me to Mrs Templeton."

"Ehem," said Mr Templeton, clearing his throat, and with a slight but embarrassed smile, "I never thought I should marry again."

"*L'homme propose et Dieu dispose,*" observed Lumley Ferrers ; for it was he.

"Gently, my dear nephew," replied Mr Templeton, gravely ; "those phrases are somewhat sacrilegious ; I am an old-fashioned person, you know."

"Ten thousand apologies."

"One apology will suffice ; these hyperboles of phrase are almost sinful."

"Confounded old prig !" thought Ferrers ; but he bowed sanctimoniously.

"My dear uncle, I have been a wild fellow in my day : but with years comes reflection ; and under your guidance, if I may hope for it, I trust to grow a wiser and a better man."

"It is well, Lumley," returned the uncle ; "and I am very glad to see you returned to your own country. Will you dine with me to-morrow ? I am living near Fulham. You had better bring your carpet-bag, and stay with me some days ; you will be heartily welcome, especially if you can shift without a foreign servant. I have a great compassion for papists, but——"

"Oh, my dear uncle, do not fear ; I am not rich enough to have a foreign servant, and have not travelled over three quarters of the globe without learning that it is possible to dispense with a valet."

"As to being rich enough," observed Mr Templeton, with a calculating air, "seven hundred and ninety-five

pounds ten shillings a-year will allow a man to keep *two* servants, if he pleases ; but I am glad to find you economical at all events. We meet to-morrow, then, at six o'clock."

" *Au revoir*—I mean, God bless you."

"Tiresome old gentleman that," muttered Ferrers, "and not so cordial as formerly ; perhaps his wife is *enceinte*, and he is going to do me the injustice of having another heir. I must look to this ; for without riches, I had better go back and live *au cinquième* at Paris."

With this conclusion, Lumley quickened his pace, and soon arrived in Seamore Place. In a few moments more he was in the library well stored with books, and decorated with marble busts and images from the studios of Canova and Thorwaldsen.

"My master, sir, will be down immediately," said the servant who admitted him ; and Ferrers threw himself on a sofa, and contemplated the apartment with an air half envious and half cynical.

Presently the door opened, and "My dear Ferrers !" "Well, *mon cher*, how are you ?" were the salutations hastily exchanged.

After the first sentences of inquiry, gratulation, and welcome, had cleared the way for more general conversation—"Well, Maltravers," said Ferrers, "so here we are together again, and after a lapse of so many years ! both older, certainly ; and you, I suppose, wiser. At all events, people think you so ; and that's

all that's important in the question. Why, man, you are looking as young as ever, only a little paler and thinner: but look at me—I am not very *much* past thirty, and I am almost an old man; bald at the temples, crows' feet, too, eh! Idleness ages one damnably."

"Pooh, Lumley, I never saw you look better. And are you really come to settle in England?"

"Yes, if I can afford it. But at my age, and after having seen so much, the life of an idle, obscure *garçon* does not content me. I feel that the world's opinion, which I used to despise, is growing necessary to me. I want to be something. What can I be? Don't look alarmed, I won't rival you. I dare say literary reputation is a fine thing, but I desire some distinction more substantial and worldly. You know your own country; give me a map of the roads to Power."

"To Power! Oh, nothing but law, politics, and riches."

"For law I am too old; politics, perhaps, might suit me; but riches, my dear Ernest—ah, how I long for a good account with my banker!"

"Well, patience and hope. Are you not a rich uncle's heir?"

"I don't know," said Ferrers, very dolorously; "the old gentleman has married again, and may have a family."

"Married!—to whom?"

"A widow, I hear; I know nothing more, except

that she has a child already. So you see she has got into a cursed way of having children. And, perhaps, by the time I'm forty, I shall see a whole covey of cherubs flying away with the great Templeton property!"

"Ha, ha! your despair sharpens your wit, Lumley; but why not take a leaf out of your uncle's book, and marry yourself?"

"So I will, when I can find an heiress. If that is what you meant to say, it is a more sensible suggestion than any I could have supposed to come from a man who writes books, especially poetry; and your advice is not to be despised. For rich I will be; and as the fathers (I don't mean of the Church, but in Horace) told the rising generation, the first thing is to resolve to be rich, it is only the second thing to consider how."

"Meanwhile, Ferrers, you will be my guest."

"I'll dine with you to-day; but to-morrow I am off to Fulham, to be introduced to my aunt. Can't you fancy her?—grey gros de Naples gown; gold chain with an eyeglass; rather fat; two pugs and a parrot! 'Start not, this is fancy's sketch!' I have not yet seen the respectable relative with my physical optics. What shall we have for dinner? Let *me* choose, you were always a bad caterer."

As Ferrers thus rattled on, Maltravers felt himself growing younger; old times and old adventures crowded fast upon him; and the two friends spent a most agreeable day together. It was only the next

morning that Maltravers, in thinking over the various conversations that had passed between them, was forced reluctantly to acknowledge that the inert selfishness of Lumley Ferrers seemed now to have hardened into a resolute and systematic want of principle, which might, perhaps, make him a dangerous and designing man, if urged by circumstances into action.

CHAPTER II.

Dauph. Sir, I must speak to you. I have been long your despised kinsman.

Morose. Oh, what thou wilt, nephew.—*EPICENE.*

Her silence is dowry eno'—exceedingly soft spoken; thrifty of her speech, that spends but six words a-day.—*Ibid.*

THE coach dropped Mr Ferrers at the gate of a villa about three miles from town. The lodge-keeper charged himself with the carpet-bag, and Ferrers strolled, with his hands behind him (it was his favourite mode of disposing of them), through the beautiful and elaborate pleasure-grounds.

“A very nice, snug, little box (jointure-house, I suppose)! I would not grudge that, I'm sure, if I had but the rest. But here, I suspect, comes madam's first specimen of the art of having a family.” This last thought was extracted from Mr Ferrers's contemplative brain by a lovely little girl, who came running up to him, fearless and spoilt as she was; and, after indulging a tolerable stare, exclaimed, “Are you come to see papa, sir?”

“Papa!—the deuce!” thought Lumley; “and who is papa, my dear?”

“Why, mamma’s husband. He is not my papa by rights.”

“Certainly not, my love ; not by rights—I comprehend.”

“Eh !”

“Yes, I am going to your papa by wrongs—Mr Templeton.”

“Oh, this way, then.”

“You are very fond of Mr Templeton, my little angel ?”

“To be sure I am. You have not seen the rocking-horse he is going to give me.”

“Not yet, sweet child ! And how is mamma ?”

“Oh, poor, dear mamma,” said the child, with a sudden change of voice, and tears in her eyes. “Ah, she is not well !”

“In the family way, to a dead certainty !” muttered Ferrers, with a groan ; “but here is my uncle. Horrid name ! Uncles were always wicked fellows. Richard III., and the man who did something or other to the babes in the wood, were a joke to my hard-hearted old relation, who has robbed me with a widow ! The lustful, liquorish old—My *dear* sir, I’m so glad to see you !”

Mr Templeton, who was a man very cold in his manners, and always either looked over people’s heads or down upon the ground, just touched his nephew’s outstretched hand, and, telling him he was welcome, observed that it was a very fine afternoon.

“Very, indeed : sweet place this : you see, by the

way, that I have already made acquaintance with my fair cousin-in-law. She is very pretty."

"I really think she is," said Mr Templeton, with some warmth, and gazing fondly at the child, who was now throwing buttercups up in the air, and trying to catch them. Mr Ferrers wished in his heart that they had been brick-bats!

"Is she like her mother?" asked the nephew.

"Like whom, sir?"

"Her mother—Mrs Templeton."

"No, not very; there is an air, perhaps, but the likeness is not remarkably strong. Would you not like to go to your room before dinner?"

"Thank you. Can I not first be presented to Mrs Tem——"

"She is at her devotions, Mr Lumley," interrupted Mr Templeton, grimly.

"The she-hypocrite!" thought Ferrers. "Oh, I am delighted that your pious heart has found so congenial a helpmate!"

"It is a great blessing, and I am grateful for it. This is the way to the house."

Lumley, now formally installed in a grave bedroom, with dimity curtains, and dark-brown paper with light-brown stars on it, threw himself into a large chair, and yawned and stretched with as much fervour as if he could have yawned and stretched himself into his uncle's property. He then slowly exchanged his morning dress for a quiet suit of black, and thanked his stars that, amidst all his sins, he had never been a dandy,

and had never rejoiced in a fine waistcoat—a criminal possession that he well knew would have entirely hardened his uncle's conscience against him. He tarried in his room till the second bell summoned him to descend ; and then, entering the drawing-room, which had a cold look even in July, found his uncle standing by the mantelpiece, and a young, slight, handsome woman, half-buried in a huge but not comfortable *fauteuil*.

“Your aunt, Mrs Templeton ; madam, my nephew, Mr Lumley Ferrers,” said Templeton, with a wave of the hand. “John,—dinner !”

“I hope I am not late !”

“No,” said Templeton, gently, for he had always liked his nephew, and began now to thaw towards him a little on seeing that Lumley put a good face upon the new state of affairs.

“No, my dear boy—no ; but I think order and punctuality cardinal virtues in a well-regulated family.”

“Dinner, sir,” said the butler, opening the folding-doors at the end of the room.

“Permit me,” said Lumley, offering his arm to the aunt. “What a lovely place this is !”

Mrs Templeton said something in reply, but what it was, Ferrers could not discover, so low and choked was the voice.

“Shy,” thought he : “odd for a widow ! but that's the way those husband-buriers take us in !”

Plain as was the general furniture of the apartment, the natural ostentation of Mr Templeton broke out in

the massive value of the plate, and the number of the attendants. He was a rich man, and he was proud of his riches : he knew it was respectable to be rich, and he thought it was moral to be respectable. As for the dinner, Lumley knew enough of his uncle's tastes to be prepared for viands and wines that even he (fastidious gourmand as he was) did not despise.

Between the intervals of eating, Mr Ferrers endeavoured to draw his aunt into conversation, but he found all his ingenuity fail him. There was, in the features of Mrs Templeton, an expression of deep but calm melancholy, that would have saddened most persons to look upon, especially in one so young and lovely. It was evidently something beyond shyness or reserve that made her so silent and subdued, and even in her silence there was so much natural sweetness, that Ferrers could not ascribe her manner to haughtiness, or the desire to repel. He was rather puzzled ; "for though," thought he, sensibly enough, "my uncle is not a youth, he is a very rich fellow ; and how any widow, who is married again to a rich old fellow, can be melancholy, passes my understanding !"

Templeton, as if to draw attention from his wife's taciturnity, talked more than usual. He entered largely into politics, and regretted that in times so critical he was not in parliament.

"Did I possess your youth and your health, Lumley, I would not neglect my country—Popery is abroad."

"I myself should like very much to be in parliament," said Lumley, boldly.

“I daresay you would,” returned the uncle, dryly. “Parliament is very expensive—only fit for those who have a large stake in the country. Champagne to Mr Ferrers.”

Lumley bit his lip and spoke little during the rest of the dinner. Mr Templeton, however, waxed gracious by the time the dessert was on the table; and began cutting up a pine-apple, with many assurances to Lumley that gardens were nothing without pineries. “Whenever you settle in the country, nephew, be sure you have a pinery.”

“Oh, yes,” said Lumley, almost bitterly, “and a pack of hounds, and a French cook; they will all suit my fortune very well.”

“You are more thoughtful on pecuniary matters than you used to be,” said the uncle.

“Sir,” replied Ferrers, solemnly, “in a very short time I shall be what is called a middle-aged man.”

“Humph!” said the host.

There was another silence. Lumley was a man, as we have said, or implied before, of great knowledge of human nature, at least the ordinary sort of it, and he now revolved in his mind the various courses it might be wise to pursue towards his rich relation. He saw that, in delicate fencing, his uncle had over him the same advantage that a tall man has over a short one with the physical sword-play;—by holding his weapon in a proper position, he kept the other at arm’s length. There was a grand reserve and dignity about the man who had something to give away, of which Ferrers,

however actively he might shift his ground and flourish his rapier, could not break the defence. He determined, therefore, upon a new game, for which his frankness of manner admirably adapted him. Just as he formed this resolution, Mrs Templeton rose, and with a gentle bow, and soft, though languid smile, glided from the room. The two gentlemen resettled themselves, and Templeton pushed the bottle to Ferrers.

“Help yourself, Lumley ; your travels seem to have deprived you of your high spirits—you are pensive.”

“Sir,” said Ferrers, abruptly, “I wish to consult you.”

“Oh, young man ! you have been guilty of some excess—you have gambled—you have——”

“I have done nothing, sir, that should make me less worthy your esteem. I repeat, I wish to consult you ; I have outlived the hot days of my youth—I am now alive to the claims of the world. I have talents, I believe ; and I have application, I know. I wish to fill a position in the world that may redeem my past indolence, and do credit to my family. Sir, I set your example before me, and I now ask your counsel, with the determination to follow it.”

Templeton was startled ; he half shaded his face with his hand, and gazed searchingly upon the high forehead and bold eyes of his nephew. “I believe you are sincere,” said he after a pause.

“You may well believe so, sir.”

“Well, I will think of this. I like an honourable ambition—not too extravagant a one—*that* is sinful ;

but a *respectable* station in the world is a proper object of desire, and wealth is a blessing; because," added the rich man, taking another slice of the pine-apple—"it enables us to be of use to our fellow-creatures!"

"Sir, then," said Ferrers, with daring animation—"then I avow that my ambition is precisely of the kind you speak of. I am obscure, I desire to be reputedly known: my fortune is mediocre, I desire it to be great. I ask *you* for nothing—I know your generous heart; but I wish independently to work out my own career!"

"Lumley," said Templeton, "I never esteemed you so much as I do now. Listen to me—I will confide in you: I think the government are under obligations to me."

"I know it," exclaimed Ferrers, whose eyes sparkled at the thought of a sinecure—for sinecures *then* existed!

"And," pursued the uncle, "I intend to ask them a favour in return."

"Oh, sir!"

"Yes; I think—mark me—with management and address, I may——"

"Well, my dear sir!"

"Obtain a barony for myself and heirs; I trust I shall soon have a family!"

Had somebody given Lumley Ferrers a hearty cuff on the ear, he would have thought less of it than of this wind-up of his uncle's ambitious projects. His

jaws fell, his eyes grew an inch larger, and he remained perfectly speechless.

“Ay,” pursued Mr Templeton, “I have long dreamed of this ; my character is spotless, my fortune great. I have ever exerted my parliamentary influence in favour of ministers ; and, in this commercial country, no man has higher claims than Richard Templeton to the honours of a virtuous, loyal, and religious state. Yes, my boy, I like your ambition—you see I have some of it myself ; and since you are sincere in your wish to tread in my footsteps, I think I can obtain you a junior partnership in a highly respectable establishment. Let me see ; your capital now is——”

“Pardon me, sir,” interrupted Lumley, colouring with indignation despite himself ; “I honour commerce much, but my paternal relations are not such as would allow me to enter into trade. And, permit me to add,” continued he, seizing with instant adroitness the new weakness presented to him—“permit me to add, that those relations who have been ever kind to me, would, properly managed, be highly efficient in promoting your own views of advancement ; for your sake I would not break with them. Lord Saxingham is still a minister—nay, he is in the cabinet.”

“Hem—Lumley—hem !” said Templeton, thoughtfully : “we will consider—we will consider. Any more wine ?”

“No, I thank you, sir.”

“Then I’ll just take my evening stroll, and think over matters. You can rejoin Mrs Templeton. And

I say, Lumley—I read prayers at nine o'clock.—Never forget your Maker, and He will not forget you. The barony will be an excellent thing—eh?—an English peerage—yes—an English peerage! very different from your beggarly countships abroad!”

So saying, Mr Templeton rang for his hat and cane, and stepped into the lawn from the window of the dining-room.

“‘The world’s mine oyster, which I with sword will open,’” muttered Ferrers; “I would mould this selfish old man to my purpose; for, since I have neither genius to write, nor eloquence to declaim, I will at least see whether I have not cunning to plot, and courage to act. Conduct—conduct—conduct—there lies my talent; and what is conduct but a steady walk from a design to its execution!”

With these thoughts Ferrers sought Mrs Templeton. He opened the folding-doors very gently, for all his habitual movements were quick and noiseless, and perceived that Mrs Templeton sat by the window, and that she seemed engrossed with a book which lay open on a little work-table before her.

“Fordyce’s Advice to young Married Women, I suppose. Sly jade! However, I must not have her against me.”

He approached; still Mrs Templeton did not note him; nor was it till he stood facing her that he himself observed that her tears were falling fast over the page.

He was a little embarrassed, and, turning towards

the window, affected to cough, and then said, without looking at Mrs Templeton, "I fear I have disturbed you."

"No," answered the same low, stifled voice that had before replied to Lumley's vain attempts to provoke conversation; "it was a melancholy employment, and perhaps it is not right to indulge in it."

"May I inquire what author so affected you?"

"It is but a volume of poems, and I am no judge of poetry; but it contains thoughts which—which——" Mrs Templeton paused abruptly, and Lumley quietly took up the book.

"Ah!" said he, turning to the title-page—"my friend ought to be much flattered."

"Your friend?"

"Yes; this, I see, is by Ernest Maltravers, a very intimate ally of mine."

"I should like to see him," cried Mrs Templeton, almost with animation—"I read but little; it was by chance that I met with one of his books, and they are as if I heard a dear friend speaking to me. Ah, I should like to see him!"

"I'm sure, madam," said the voice of a third person, in an austere and rebuking accent, "I do not see what good it would do your immortal soul to see a man who writes idle verses, which appear to me, indeed, highly immoral. I just looked into that volume this morning, and found nothing but trash—love-sonnets and such stuff."

Mrs Templeton made no reply, and Lumley, in

order to change the conversation, which seemed a little too matrimonial for his taste, said, rather awkwardly, "You are returned very soon, sir."

"Yes, I don't like walking in the rain!"

"Bless me, it rains, so it does—I had not observed——"

"Are you wet, sir? had you not better——" began the wife timidly.

"No, ma'am, I'm not wet, I thank you. By the by, nephew, this new author is a friend of yours. I wonder a man of his family should condescend to turn author. He can come to no good. I hope you will drop his acquaintance—authors are very unprofitable associates, I'm sure. I trust I shall see no more of Mr Maltravers's books in my house."

"Nevertheless, he is well thought of, sir, and makes no mean figure in the world," said Lumley, stoutly; for he was by no means disposed to give up a friend who might be as useful to him as Mr Templeton himself.

"Figure, or no figure—I have not had many dealings with authors in my day; and when I had, I always repented it. Not sound, sir, not sound—all cracked somewhere. Mrs Templeton, have the kindness to get the Prayer-book—my hassock must be fresh stuffed, it gives me quite a pain in my knee. Lumley, will you ring the bell? Your aunt is very melancholy. True religion is not gloomy; we will read a sermon on Cheerfulness."

"So, so," said Mr Ferrers to himself, as he undressed

that night—"I see that my uncle is a little displeased with my aunt's pensive face—a little jealous of her thinking of anything but himself: *tant mieux*. I must work upon this discovery; it will not do for them to live too happily with each other. And what with that lever, and what with his ambitious projects, I think I see a way to push the good things of this world a few inches nearer to Lunley Ferrers."

CHAPTER III.

The pride too of her step, as light
Along the unconscious earth she went,
Seemed that of one, born with a right
To walk some heavenlier element.—*Loves of the Angels.*

Can it be
That these fine impulses, these lofty thoughts
Burning with their own beauty, are but given
To make me the low slave of vanity?—*Erinna.*

Is she not too fair
Even to think of maiden's sweetest care?
The mouth and brow are contrasts.—*Ibid.*

It was two or three evenings after the date of the last chapter, and there was what the newspapers call "a select party" in one of the noblest mansions in London. A young lady, on whom all eyes were bent, and whose beauty might have served the painter for a model of a Semiramis or Zenobia, more majestic than became her years, and so classically faultless as to have something cold and statue-like in its haughty lineaments, was moving through the crowd that murmured applauses as she past. This lady was Florence Lascelles, the daughter of Lumley's great relation, the Earl of Saxingham, and supposed to be the richest heiress in England. Lord Saxingham himself drew aside his daughter as she swept along.

“Florence,” said he in a whisper, “the Duke of —— is greatly struck with you—be civil to him—I am about to present him.”

So saying, the earl turned to a small, dark, stiff-looking man, of about twenty-eight years of age, at his left, and introduced the Duke of —— to Lady Florence Lascelles. The duke was unmarried; it was an introduction between the greatest *match* and the wealthiest heiress in the peerage.

“Lady Florence,” said Lord Saxingham, “is as fond of horses as yourself, duke, though not quite so good a judge.”

“I confess I *do* like horses,” said the duke, with an ingenuous air.

Lord Saxingham moved away.

Lady Florence stood mute—one glance of bright contempt shot from her large eyes; her lip slightly curled, and she then half turned aside, and seemed to forget that her new acquaintance was in existence.

His grace, like most great personages, was not apt to take offence; nor could he, indeed, ever suppose that any slight towards the Duke of —— could be intended; still he thought it would be proper in Lady Florence to begin the conversation; for he himself, though not shy, was habitually silent, and accustomed to be saved the fatigue of defraying the small charges of society. After a pause, seeing, however, that Lady Florence remained speechless, he began—

“You ride sometimes in the Park, Lady Florence?”

“Very seldom.”

“It is, indeed, too warm for riding at present.”

“I did not say so.”

“Hem—I thought you did.”

Another pause.

“Did you speak, Lady Florence?”

“No.”

“Oh! I beg pardon—Lord Saxingham is looking very well.”

“I am glad you think so.”

“Your picture in the exhibition scarcely does you justice, Lady Florence; yet Lawrence is usually happy.”

“You are very flattering,” said Lady Florence, with a lively and perceptible impatience in her tone and manner. The young beauty was thoroughly spoiled—and now all the scorn of a scornful nature was drawn forth, by observing the envious eyes of the crowd were bent upon one whom the Duke of —— was actually talking to. Brilliant as were her own powers of conversation, she would not deign to exert them—she was an aristocrat of intellect rather than birth, and she took it into her head that the Duke was an idiot. She was very much mistaken. If she had but broken up the ice, she would have found that the water below was not shallow. The duke, in fact, like many other Englishmen, though he did not like the trouble of showing forth, and had an ungainly manner, was a man who had read a good deal, possessed a sound head and an honourable mind, though he did not know what it was to love anybody, to care much for any-

thing, and was at once perfectly sated and yet perfectly contented ; for apathy is the combination of satiety and content.

Still Florence judged of him as lively persons are apt to judge of the sedate : besides, she wanted to proclaim to him and to everybody else, how little she cared for dukes and great matches ; she, therefore, with a slight inclination of her head, turned away, and extended her hand to a dark young man, who was gazing on her with that respectful but unmistakable admiration which proud women are never proud enough to despise.

“ Ah, signor,” said she, in Italian, “ I am so glad to see you ; it is a relief, indeed, to find genius in a crowd of nothings.”

So saying, the heiress seated herself on one of those convenient couches which hold but two, and beckoned the Italian to her side. Oh, how the vain heart of Castruccio Cesarini beat !—what visions of love, rank, wealth, already flitted before him !

“ I almost fancy,” said Castruccio, “ that the old days of romance are returned, when a queen could turn from princes and warriors to listen to a troubadour.”

“ Troubadours are now more rare than warriors and princes,” replied Florence, with gay animation, which contrasted strongly with the coldness she had manifested to the Duke of —, “ and therefore it would not now be a very great merit in a queen to fly from dulness and insipidity to poetry and wit.”

“ Ah, say not wit,” said Cesarini ; “ wit is incompatible with the grave character of deep feelings ;—

incompatible with enthusiasm, with worship ;— incompatible with the thoughts that wait upon Lady Florence Lascelles.”

Florence coloured and slightly frowned ; but the immense distinction between her position and that of the young foreigner, with her own inexperience, both of real life and the presumption of vain hearts, made her presently forget the flattery that would have offended her in another. She turned the conversation, however, into general channels, and she talked of Italian poetry with a warmth and eloquence worthy of the theme. While they thus conversed, a new guest had arrived, who, from the spot where he stood, engaged with Lord Saxingham, fixed a steady and scrutinising gaze upon the pair.

“Lady Florence has indeed improved,” said this new guest. “I could not have conceived that England boasted any one half so beautiful.”

“She certainly is handsome, my dear Lumley—the Lascelles cast of countenance,” replied Lord Saxingham—“and so gifted ! She is positively learned—quite a *bas bleu*. I tremble to think of the crowd of poets and painters who will make a fortune out of her enthusiasm. *Entre nous*, Lumley, I could wish her married to a man of sober sense, like the Duke of — ; for sober sense is exactly what she wants. Do observe, she has been just half an hour flirting with that odd-looking adventurer, a Signor Cesarini, merely because he writes sonnets and wears a dress like a stage-player !”

"It is the weakness of the sex, my dear lord," said Lumley; "they like to patronise, and they dote upon all oddities, from china monsters to cracked poets. But I fancy, by a restless glance cast every now and then around the room, that my beautiful cousin has in her something of the coquette."

"There you are quite right, Lumley," returned Lord Saxingham, laughing; "but I will not quarrel with her for breaking hearts and refusing hands, if she do but grow steady at last, and settle into the Duchess of ——."

"Duchess of ——!" repeated Lumley, absently; "well, I will go and present myself. I see she is growing tired of the signor. I will sound her as to the ducal impressions, my dear lord."

"Do, *I* dare not," replied the father; "she is an excellent girl, but heiresses are always contradictory. It was very foolish to deprive me of all control over her fortune. Come and see me again soon, Lumley. I suppose you are going abroad?"

"No, I shall settle in England; but of my prospects and plans more hereafter."

With this, Lumley quietly glided away to Florence. There was something in Ferrers that was remarkable from its very simplicity. His clear, sharp features, with the short hair and high brow — the absolute plainness of his dress, and the noiseless, easy, self-collected calm of all his motions, made a strong contrast to the showy Italian, by whose side he now stood. Florence looked up at him with some little surprise at his intrusion.

“Ah, you don’t recollect me!” said Lumley, with his pleasant laugh. “Faithless Imogen, after all your vows of constancy! Behold your Alonzo!—

‘The worms they crept in and the worms they crept out.’

Don’t you remember how you trembled when I told you that true story, as we

‘Conversed as we sat on the green?’”

“Oh!” cried Florence, “it is indeed you, my dear cousin—my dear Lumley! What an age since we parted!”

“Don’t talk of age—it is an ugly word to a man of my years. Pardon, signor, if I disturb you.”

And here Lumley, with a low bow, slid coolly into the place which Cesarini, who had shyly risen, left vacant for him. Castruccio looked disconcerted; but Florence had forgotten him in her delight at seeing Lumley, and Cesarini moved discontentedly away, and seated himself at a distance.

“And I come back,” continued Lumley, “to find you a confirmed beauty and a professional coquette—Don’t blush!”

“Do they, indeed, call me a coquette?”

“Oh, yes—for once the world is just.”

“Perhaps I do deserve the reproach. Oh, Lumley, how I despise all that I see and hear!”

“What, even the Duke of ——?”

“Yes, I fear even the Duke of —— is no exception!”

“Your father will go mad if he hear you.”

“My father!—my poor father!—yes, he thinks the utmost that I, Florence Lascelles, am made for, is to wear a ducal coronet and give the best balls in London.”

“And, pray, what was Florence Lascelles made for?”

“Ah! I cannot answer the question. I fear for Discontent and Disdain.”

“You are an enigma—but I will take pains and not rest till I solve you.”

“I defy you.”

“Thanks—better defy than despise.”

“Oh, you must be strangely altered, if I can despise *you*.”

“Indeed! what do you remember of me?”

“That you were frank, bold, and therefore, I suppose, true!—that you shocked my aunts and my father by your contempt for the vulgar hypocrisies of our conventional life. Oh, no! I cannot despise you.”

Lumley raised his eyes to those of Florence—he gazed on her long and earnestly—ambitious hopes rose high within him.

“My fair cousin,” said he, in an altered and serious tone, “I see something in your spirit kindred to mine; and I am glad that yours is one of the earliest voices which confirm my new resolves on my return to busy England!”

“And those resolves?”

“Are an Englishman’s—energetic and ambitious.”

“Alas, ambition! How many false portraits are there of the great original!”

Lumley thought he had found a clue to the heart of his cousin, and he began to expatiate, with unusual eloquence, on the nobleness of that daring sin which "lost angels heaven." Florence listened to him with attention, but not with sympathy. Lumley was deceived. His was not an ambition that could attract the fastidious but high-souled Idealist. The selfishness of his nature broke out in all the sentiments that he fancied would seem to her most elevated. Place—power—titles—all these objects were low and vulgar to one who saw them daily at her feet.

At a distance, the Duke of —— continued from time to time to direct his cold gaze at Florence. He did not like her the less for not seeming to court him. He had something generous within him, and could understand her. He went away at last, and thought seriously of Florence as a wife. Not a wife for companionship, for friendship, for love; but a wife who could take the trouble of rank off his hands—do him honour, and raise him an heir, whom he might flatter himself would be his own.

From his corner also, with dreams yet more vain and daring, Castruccio Cesarini cast his eyes upon the queen-like brow of the great heiress. Oh, yes, she had a soul—she could disdain rank and revere genius! What a triumph over De Montaigne—Maltravers—all the world, if he, the neglected poet, could win the hand for which the magnates of the earth sighed in vain! Pure and lofty as he thought himself, it was her birth and her wealth which Cesarini adored in

Florence. And Lumley, nearer perhaps to the prize than either—yet still far off—went on conversing, with eloquent lips and sparkling eyes, while his cold heart was planning every word, dictating every glance, and laying out (for the most worldly are often the most visionary) the chart for a royal road to fortune. And Florence Lascelles, when the crowd had dispersed and she sought her chamber, forgot all three; and, with that morbid romance often peculiar to those for whom Fate smiles the most, mused over the ideal image of the one she *could* love—“in maiden meditation *not* fancy-free!”

CHAPTER IV.

In mea vesanas habui dispendia vires,
Et valui penas fortis in ipse meas.*—*OVID.*

Then might my breast be read within,
A thousand volumes would be written there.

EARL OF STIRLING.

ERNEST MALTRAVERS was at the height of his reputation; the work which he had deemed the crisis that was to make or mar him was the most brilliantly successful of all he had yet committed to the public. Certainly, chance did as much for it as merit, as is usually the case with works that become instantaneously popular. We may hammer away at the casket with strong arm and good purpose, and all in vain;—when some morning a careless stroke hits the right nail on the head, and we secure the treasure.

It was at this time, when in the prime of youth—rich, courted, respected, run after—that Ernest Maltravers fell seriously ill. It was no active or visible disease, but a general irritability of the nerves, and a languid sinking of the whole frame. His labours began,

* I had the strength of a madman to my own cost, and employed that strength in my own punishment.

perhaps, to tell against him. In earlier life he had been as active as a hunter of the chamois, and the hardy exercise of his frame counteracted the effects of a restless and ardent mind. The change from an athletic to a sedentary habit of life—the wear and tear of the brain—the absorbing passion for knowledge which day and night kept all his faculties in a stretch, made strange havoc in a constitution naturally strong. The poor author! how few persons understand, and forbear with, and pity him! He sells his health and youth to a rugged taskmaster. And, O blind and selfish world, you expect him to be as free of manner, and as pleasant of cheer, and as equal of mood, as if he were passing the most agreeable and healthful existence that pleasure could afford to smooth the wrinkles of the mind, or medicine invent to regulate the nerves of the body! But there was, besides all this, another cause that operated against the successful man!—His heart was too solitary. He lived without the sweet household ties—the connections and amities he formed excited for a moment, but possessed no charm to comfort or to soothe. Cleveland resided so much in the country, and was of so much calmer a temperament, and so much more advanced in age, that with all the friendship that subsisted between them, there was none of that daily and familiar interchange of confidence which affectionate natures demand as the very food of life. Of his brother (as the reader will conjecture from never having been formally presented to him) Ernest saw but little. Colonel Maltravers, one of the gayest

and handsomest men of his time, married to a fine lady, lived principally at Paris, except when, for a few weeks in the shooting season, he filled his country house with companions who had nothing in common with Ernest: the brothers corresponded regularly every quarter, and saw each other once a-year—this was all their intercourse. Ernest Maltravers stood in the world alone, with that cold but anxious spectre—Reputation.

It was late at night. Before a table covered with the monuments of erudition and thought sat a young man with a pale and worn countenance. The clock in the room told with a fretting distinctness every moment that lessened the journey to the grave. There was an anxious and expectant expression on the face of the student, and from time to time he glanced to the clock, and muttered to himself. Was it a letter from some adored mistress—the soothing flattery from some mighty arbiter of arts and letters—that the young man eagerly awaited? No; the aspirer was forgotten in the valetudinarian. Ernest Maltravers was waiting the visit of his physician, whom at that late hour a sudden thought had induced him to summon from his rest. At length the well-known knock was heard, and in a few moments the physician entered. He was one well versed in the peculiar pathology of book men, and kindly as well as skilful.

“My dear Mr Maltravers, what is this? How are we?—not seriously ill, I hope—no relapse—pulse low and irregular, I see, but no fever. You are nervous.”

“Doctor,” said the student, “I did not send for you at this time of night from the idle fear or fretful caprice of an invalid. But when I saw you this morning, you dropped some hints which have haunted me ever since. Much that it befits the conscience and the soul to attend to without loss of time, depends upon my full knowledge of my real state. If I understand you rightly, I may have but a short time to live—is it so?”

“Indeed,” said the doctor, turning away his face, “you have exaggerated my meaning. I did not say that you were in what we technically call danger.”

“Am I then likely to be a *long*-lived man?”

The doctor coughed—“That is uncertain, my dear young friend,” said he, after a pause.

“Be plain with me. The plans of life must be based upon such calculations as we can reasonably form of its probable duration. Do not fancy that I am weak enough or coward enough to shrink from any abyss which I have approached unconsciously; I desire—I adjure—nay, I command you to be explicit.

There was an earnest and solemn dignity in his patient’s voice and manner which deeply touched and impressed the good physician.

“I will answer you frankly,” said he; “you overwork the nerves and the brain; if you do not relax, you will subject yourself to confirmed disease and premature death. For several months—perhaps for years to come—you should wholly cease from literary labour. Is this a hard sentence? You are rich and young—enjoy yourself while you can.”

Maltravers appeared satisfied—changed the conversation—talked easily on other matters for a few minutes: nor was it till he had dismissed his physician that he broke forth with the thoughts that were burning in him.

“Oh!” cried he aloud, as he rose and paced the room with rapid strides; “now, when I see before me the broad and luminous path, am I to be condemned to halt and turn aside? A vast empire rises on my view, greater than that of Cæsars and conquerors—an empire durable and universal in the souls of men, that time itself cannot overthrow; and Death marches with me, side by side, and the skeleton hand waves me back to the nothingness of common men.”

He paused at the casement—he threw it open, and leant forth and gasped for air. Heaven was serene and still, as morning came coldly forth amongst the waning stars; and the haunts of men, in their thoroughfare of idleness and of pleasure, were desolate and void. Nothing, save Nature, was awake.

“And if, O stars!” murmured Maltravers, from the depth of his excited heart—“if I have been insensible to your solemn beauty—if the Heaven and the Earth had been to me but as air and clay—if I were one of a dull and dim-eyed herd—I might live on, and drop into the grave from the ripeness of unprofitable years. It is because I yearn for the great objects of an immortal being, that life shrinks and shrivels up like a scroll. Away! I will not listen to these human and material monitors, and consider life as a thing greater than the

things that I would live for. My choice is made—glory is more persuasive than the grave.”

He turned impatiently from the casement—his eyes flashed—his chest heaved—he trod the chamber with a monarch’s air. All the calculations of prudence, all the tame and methodical reasonings with which, from time to time, he had sought to sober down the impetuous man into the calm machine, faded away before the burst of awful and commanding passions that swept over his soul. Tell a man, in the full tide of his triumphs, that he bears death within him ; and what crisis of thought can be more startling and more terrible !

Maltravers had, as we have seen, cared little for fame, till fame had been brought within his reach ; then, with every step he took, new Alps had arisen. Each new conjecture brought to light a new truth that demanded enforcement or defence. Rivalry and competition chafed his blood, and kept his faculties at their full speed. He had the generous race-horse spirit of emulation. Ever in action, ever in progress, cheered on by the sarcasms of foes, even more than by the applause of friends, the desire of glory had become the habit of existence. When we have commenced a career, what stop is there till the grave?—where is the definite barrier of that ambition which, like the Eastern bird, seems ever on the wing, and never rests upon the earth ? Our names are not settled till our death ; the ghosts of what we have done are made our haunting monitors—our scourging

avengers—if ever we cease to do, or fall short of the younger past. Repose is oblivion; to pause is to unravel all the web that we have woven—until the tomb closes over us, and men, just when it is too late, strike the fair balance between ourselves and our rivals; and we are measured, not by the least, but by the greatest triumphs we have achieved. Oh, what a crushing sense of impotence comes over us, when we feel that our frame cannot support our mind—when the hand can no longer execute what the soul, actively as ever, conceives and desires!—the quick life tied to the dead form—the ideas fresh as immortality, gushing forth rich and golden, and the broken nerves, and the aching frame, and the weary eyes!—the spirit athirst for liberty and heaven—and the damning choking consciousness that we are walled up and prisoned in a dungeon that must be our burial-place. Talk not of freedom—there is no such thing as freedom to a man whose body is the jail, whose infirmities are the racks, of his genius!

Maltravers paused at last, and threw himself on his sofa, wearied and exhausted. Involuntarily, and as a half unconscious means of escaping from his conflicting and profitless emotions, he turned to several letters, which had for hours lain unopened on his table. Every one the seal of which he broke, seemed to mock his state—every one seemed to attest the felicity of his fortunes. Some bespoke the admiring sympathy of the highest and the wisest—one offered him a brilliant opening into public life—another (it was from Cleve-

land) was fraught with all the proud and rapturous approbation of a prophet whose auguries are at last fulfilled. At that letter Maltravers sighed deeply and paused before he turned to the others. The last he opened was in an unknown hand, nor was any name affixed to it. Like all writers of some note, Maltravers was in the habit of receiving anonymous letters of praise, censure, warning, and exhortation—especially from young ladies at boarding-schools, and old ladies in the country ; but there was that in the first sentences of the letter, which he now opened with a careless hand, that riveted his attention. It was a small and beautiful handwriting, yet the letters were more clear and bold than they usually are in feminine caligraphy.

“Ernest Maltravers,” began this singular effusion, “have you weighed yourself?—Are you aware of your capacities?—Do you feel that for you there may be a more dazzling reputation than that which appears to content you? You who seem to penetrate into the subtlest windings of the human heart, and to have examined nature as through a glass—you, whose thoughts stand forth like armies marshalled in defence of truth, bold and dauntless, and without a stain upon their glittering armour ;—are you, at your age, and with your advantages, to bury yourself amidst books and scrolls? Do you forget that action is the grand career for men who think as you do? Will this word-weighing and picture-writing—the cold eulogies of pedants—the listless praises of literary idlers, content all the yearnings of your ambition? You were

not made solely for the closet ; 'The Dreams of Pindus and the Aonian Maids' cannot endure through the noon of manhood. You are too practical for the mere poet, and too poetical to sink into the dull tenor of a learned life. I have never seen you, yet I know you—I read your spirit in your page ; that aspiration for something better and greater than the great and the good, which colours all your passionate revelations of yourself and others, cannot be satisfied merely by ideal images. You cannot be contented, as poets and historians mostly are, by becoming great only from delineating great men, or imagining great events, or describing a great era. Is it not worthier of you to *be* what you fancy or relate ? Awake, Maltravers, awake ! Look into your heart, and feel your proper destinies. And who am I that thus address you ?—a woman whose soul is filled with you—a woman, in whom your eloquence has awakened, amidst frivolous and vain circles, the sense of a new existence—a woman who would make you, yourself, the embodied ideal of your own thoughts and dreams, and who would ask from earth no other lot than that of following you on the road of fame with the eyes of her heart. Mistake me not ; I repeat that I have never seen you, nor do I wish it ; you might be other than I imagine, and I should lose an idol, and be left without a worship. I am a kind of visionary Rosicrucian : it is a spirit that I adore, and not a being like myself. You imagine, perhaps, that I have some purpose to serve in this—I have no object in administering to your vanity ; and,

if I judge you rightly, this letter is one that might make you vain without a blush. Oh, the admiration that does not spring from holy and profound sources of emotion—how it saddens us or disgusts! I have had my share of vulgar homage, and it only makes me feel doubly alone. I am richer than you are—I have youth—I have what they call beauty. And neither riches, youth, nor beauty ever gave me the silent and deep happiness I experience when I think of you. This is a worship that might, I repeat, well make even you vain. Think of these words, I implore you. Be worthy, not of my thoughts, but of the shape in which they represent you; and every ray of glory that surrounds you will brighten my own way, and inspire me with a kindred emulation. Farewell.—I may write to you again, but you will never discover me; and in life I pray that we may never meet!”

CHAPTER V.

Our list of nobles next let Amri grace.

Absalom and Achitophel.

Sine me vacivum tempus ne quod dem mihi
Laboris.*—TER.

“I CAN’T think,” said one of a group of young men, loitering by the steps of a club-house in St James’s Street—“I can’t think what has chanced to Maltravers. Do you observe (as he walks—there—the other side of the way) how much he is altered? He stoops like an old man, and hardly ever lifts his eyes from the ground. He certainly seems sick and sad!”

“Writing books, I suppose.”

“Or privately married.”

“Or growing too rich—rich men are always unhappy beings.”

“Ha, Ferrers, how are you?”

“So—so! What’s the news?” replied Lumley.

“Rattler pays forfeit.”

“Oh! but in politics?”

“Hang politics!—are you turned politician?”

“At my age, what else is there left to do?”

“I thought so, by your hat; all politicians sport

* Suffer me to employ my spare time in some kind of labour.

odd-looking hats : it is very remarkable, but that is the great symptom of the disease."

"My hat!—*is* it odd?" said Ferrers, taking off the commodity in question, and seriously regarding it.

"Why, who ever saw such a brim?"

"Glad you think so."

"Why, Ferrers?"

"Because it is a prudent policy in this country to surrender something trifling up to ridicule. If people can abuse your hat or your carriage, or the shape of your nose, or a wart on your chin, they let slip a thousand more important matters. 'Tis the wisdom of the camel-driver, who gives up his gown for the camel to trample on, that he may escape himself."

"How droll you are, Ferrers! Well, I shall turn in and read the papers; and you——"

"Shall pay my visits, and rejoice in my hat."

"Good-day to you; by the by, your friend Maltravers has just past, looking thoughtful, and talking to himself! What's the matter with him?"

"Lamenting, perhaps, that he, too, does not wear an odd hat for gentlemen like you to laugh at, and leave the rest of him in peace. Good-day."

On went Ferrers, and soon found himself in the Mall of the Park. Here he was joined by Mr Templeton.

"Well, Lumley," said the latter (and it may be here remarked, that Mr Templeton now exhibited towards his nephew a greater respect of manner and tone than he had thought it necessary to observe before)—"well, Lumley, and have you seen Lord Saxingham?"

“I have, sir ; and I regret to say——”

“I thought so—I thought it,” interrupted Templeton : “no gratitude in public men—no wish, in high place, to honour virtue !”

“Pardon me ; Lord Saxingham declares that he should be delighted to forward your views—that no man more deserves a peerage ; but that——”

“Oh, yes ; always ‘*buts!*’”

“But that there are so many claimants at present whom it is impossible to satisfy ; and—and—but I feel I ought not to go on.”

“Proceed, sir, I beg.”

“Why, then, Lord Saxingham is (I must be frank) a man who has a great regard for his own family. Your marriage (a source, my dear uncle, of the greatest gratification to *me*) cuts off the probable chance of your fortune and title, if you acquire the latter, descending to——”

“Yourself !” put in Templeton, dryly. “Your relation seems, for the first time, to have discovered how dear your interests are to him.”

“For me, individually, sir, my relation does not care a rush—but he cares a great deal for any member of his house being rich and in high station. It increases the range and credit of his connections ; and Lord Saxingham is a man whom connections help to keep great. To be plain with you, he will not stir in this business, because he does not see how his kinsman is to be benefited, or his house strengthened.”

“Public virtue !” exclaimed Templeton.

“Virtue, my dear uncle, is a female : as long as she is private property, she is excellent ; but Public Virtue, like any other public lady, is a common prostitute.”

“Pshaw !” grunted Templeton, who was too much out of humour to read his nephew the lecture he might otherwise have done upon the impropriety of his simile ; for Mr Templeton was one of those men who hold it vicious to talk of vice as existing in the world ; he was very much shocked to hear anything called by its proper name.

“Has not Mrs Templeton some connections that may be useful to you ?”

“No, sir !” cried the uncle, in a voice of thunder.

“Sorry to hear it—but we cannot expect all things : you have married for love—you have a happy home, a charming wife—this is better than a title and a fine lady.”

“Mr Lumley Ferrers, you must spare me your consolations. My wife——”

“Loves you dearly, I daresay,” said the imperturbable nephew. “She has so much sentiment, is so fond of poetry. Oh, yes, she must love one who has done so much for her.”

“Done so much ; what do you mean ?”

“Why, with your fortune—your station—your just ambition—you, who might have married any one ; nay, by remaining unmarried, have conciliated all my interested, selfish relations—hang them !—you have married a lady without connections—and what more could you do for her ?”

“Pooh, pooh ; you don’t know all.”

Here Templeton stopped short, as if about to say too much, and frowned ; then, after a pause, he resumed, “Lumley, I have married, it is true. You may not be my heir, but I will make it up to you—that is, if you deserve my affection.”

“My dear unc——”

“Don’t interrupt me, I have projects for you. Let our interests be the same. The title may yet descend to you. I may have no male offspring—meanwhile, draw on me to any reasonable amount—young men have expenses—but be prudent, and if you want to get on in the world, never let the world detect you in a scrape. There, leave me now.”

“My best, my heartfelt thanks !”

“Hush—sound Lord Saxingham again ; I must and will have this bauble—I have set my heart on it.” So saying, Templeton waved away his nephew, and musingly pursued his path towards Hyde Park Corner, where his carriage awaited him. As soon as he entered his demesnes, he saw his wife’s daughter running across the lawn to greet him. His heart softened ; he checked the carriage and descended : he caressed her, he played with her, he laughed as she laughed. No parent could be more fond.

“Lumley Ferrers has talent to do me honour,” said he, anxiously, “but his principles seem unstable. However, surely that open manner is the sign of a good heart !”

Meanwhile, Ferrers, in high spirits, took his way to

Ernest's house. His friend was not at home, but Ferrers never wanted a host's presence in order to be at home himself. Books were round him in abundance, but Ferrers was not one of those who read for amusement. He threw himself into an easy-chair, and began weaving new meshes of ambition and intrigue. At length the door opened, and Maltravers entered.

"Why, Ernest, how ill you are looking!"

"I have not been well, but I am now recovering. As physicians recommend change of air to ordinary patients—so I am about to try change of habit. Active I must be—action is the condition of my being; but I must have done with books for the present. You see me in a new character."

"How?"

"That of a public man—I have entered parliament."

"You astonish me!—I have read the papers this morning. I see not even a vacancy, much less an election."

"It is all managed by the lawyer and the banker. In other words, my seat is a close borough."

"No bore of constituents. I congratulate you, and envy. I wish I were in parliament myself."

"You! I never fancied you bitten by the political mania."

"Political!—no. But it is the most respectable way, with luck, of living on the public. Better than swindling."

"A candid way of viewing the question. But I thought at one time you were half a Benthamite, and

that your motto was, 'The greatest happiness of the greatest number.'

"The greatest number to me is number *one*. I agree with the Pythagoreans—unity is the perfect principle of creation! Seriously, how can you mistake the principles of opinion for the principles of conduct? I am a Benthamite, a benevolist, as a logician; but the moment I leave the closet for the world, I lay aside speculation for others, and act for myself."

"You are at least more frank than prudent in these confessions."

"There you are wrong. It is by affecting to be worse than we are that we become popular—and we get credit for being both honest and practical fellows. My uncle's mistake is to be a hypocrite in words: it rarely answers. Be frank in words, and nobody will suspect hypocrisy in your designs."

Maltravers gazed hard at Ferrers—something revolted and displeased his high-wrought Platonism in the easy wisdom of his old friend. But he felt, almost for the first time, that Ferrers was a man to get on in the world—and he sighed:—I hope it was for the world's sake.

After a short conversation on indifferent matters, Cleveland was announced; and Ferrers, who could make nothing out of Cleveland, soon withdrew. Ferrers was now becoming an economist in his time.

"My dear Maltravers," said Cleveland when they were alone, "I am so glad to see you; for, in the first place, I rejoice to find you are extending your career of usefulness."

“Usefulness—ah, let me think so ! Life is so uncertain and so short, that we cannot too soon bring the little it can yield into the great commonwealth of the Beautiful or the Honest ; and both belong to and make up the Useful. But in politics, and in a highly artificial state, what doubts beset us ! what darkness surrounds ! If we connive at abuses, we juggle with our own reason and integrity—if we attack them, how much, how fatally we may derange that solemn and conventional ORDER which is the mainspring of the vast machine ! How little, too, can one man, whose talents may not be in that coarse road—in that mephitic atmosphere, be enabled to effect !”

“He may effect a vast deal even without eloquence or labour ;—he may effect a vast deal, if he can set one example, amidst a crowd of selfish aspirants and heated fanatics, of an honest and dispassionate man. He may effect more, if he may serve among the representatives of that hitherto unrepresented thing—Literature ; if he redeem, by an ambition above place and emolument, the character for subservience that court-poets have obtained for letters ; if he may prove that speculative knowledge is not disjoined from the practical world, and maintain the dignity of disinterestedness that should belong to learning. But the end of a scientific morality is not to serve others only, but also to perfect and accomplish our individual selves ; our own souls are a solemn trust to our own lives. You are about to add to your experience of human motives and active men ; and whatever additional wisdom you acquire will become equally

evident and equally useful, no matter whether it be communicated through action or in books. Enough of this, my dear Ernest. I have come to dine with you, and make you accompany me to-night to a house where you will be welcome, and I think interested. Nay, no excuses. I have promised Lord Latimer that he shall make your acquaintance, and he is one of the most eminent men with whom political life will connect you."

And to this change of habits, from the closet to the senate, had Maltravers been induced by a state of health, which, with most men, would have been an excuse for indolence. Indolent he could not be; he had truly said to Ferrers, that "action was the condition of his being." If THOUGHT, with its fever and aching tension, had been too severe a taskmaster on the nerves and brain, the coarse and homely pursuit of practical politics would leave the imagination and intellect in repose, while it would excite the hardier qualities and gifts, which animate without exhausting. So, at least, hoped Maltravers. He remembered the profound saying in one of his favourite German authors, "that to keep the mind and body in perfect health, it is necessary to mix habitually and betimes in the common affairs of men." And the anonymous correspondent;—had her exhortations any influence on his decision? I know not. But when Cleveland left him, Maltravers unlocked his desk, and re-perused the last letter he had received from the Unknown. The *last* letter!—yes, those epistles had now become frequent.

CHAPTER VI.

Le brillant de votre esprit donne un si grand éclat à votre teint et à vos yeux, que quoiqu'il semble que l'esprit ne doit toucher que les oreilles, il est pourtant certain que la vôtre éblouit les yeux.—*Lettres de Madame de Sévigné.**

AT Lord Latimer's house were assembled some hundreds of those persons who are rarely found together in London society : for business, politics, and literature draught off the most eminent men, and usually leave to houses that receive the world little better than indolent rank or ostentatious wealth. Even the young men of pleasure turn up their noses at parties nowadays, and find society a bore. But there are some dozen or two of houses, the owners of which are both apart from and above the fashion, in which a foreigner may see, collected under the same roof, many of the most remarkable men of busy, thoughtful, majestic England. Lord Latimer himself had been a cabinet minister. He retired from public life on pretence of ill-health ; but, in reality, because its anxious bustle was not congenial to a gentle and accomplished, but

* The brilliancy of your wit gives so great a lustre to your complexion and your eyes, that though it seems that wit should only reach the ears, it is altogether certain that yours dazzles the eyes.

somewhat feeble, mind. With a high reputation and an excellent cook he enjoyed a great popularity, both with his own party and the world in general ; and he was the centre of a small but distinguished circle of acquaintance, who drank Latimer's wine, and quoted Latimer's sayings, and liked Latimer much better, because, not being author or minister, he was not in their way.

Lord Latimer received Maltravers with marked courtesy, and even deference, and invited him to join his own whist-table, which was one of the highest compliments his lordship could pay to his intellect. But when his guest refused the proffered honour, the earl turned him over to the countess, as having become the property of the womankind ; and was soon immersed in his aspirations for the odd trick.

While Maltravers was conversing with Lady Latimer, he happened to raise his eyes, and saw opposite to him a young lady of such remarkable beauty, that he could scarcely refrain from an admiring exclamation. "And who," he asked, recovering himself, "is that lady? It is strange that even I, who go so little into the world, should be compelled to inquire the name of one whose beauty must already have made her celebrated."

"Oh, Lady Florence Lascelles—she came out last year. She is, indeed, most brilliant, yet more so in mind and accomplishments than face. I must be allowed to introduce you."

At this offer, a strange shyness, and as it were re-

luctant distrust, seized Maltravers—a kind of presentiment of danger and evil. He drew back, and would have made some excuse, but Lady Latimer did not heed his embarrassment, and was already by the side of Lady Florence Lascelles. A moment more, and beckoning to Maltravers, the countess presented him to the lady. As he bowed and seated himself beside his new acquaintance, he could not but observe that her cheeks were suffused with the most lively blushes, and that she received him with a confusion not common even in ladies just brought out, and just introduced to “a lion.” He was rather puzzled than flattered by these tokens of an embarrassment somewhat akin to his own; and the first few sentences of their conversation passed off with a certain awkwardness and reserve. At this moment, to the surprise, perhaps to the relief, of Ernest, they were joined by Lumley Ferrers.

“Ah, Lady Florence, I kiss your hands—I am charmed to find you acquainted with my friend Maltravers.”

“And Mr Ferrers, what makes him so late to-night?” asked the fair Florence, with a sudden ease which rather startled Maltravers.

“A dull dinner, *voilà tout!*—I have no other excuse.” And Ferrers, sliding into a vacant chair on the other side of Lady Florence, conversed volubly and unceasingly, as if seeking to monopolise her attention.

Ernest had not been so much captivated with the manner of Florence as he had been struck with her beauty, and now, seeing her apparently engaged with

another, he rose and quietly moved away. He was soon one of a knot of men who were conversing on the absorbing topics of the day ; and as by degrees the exciting subject brought out his natural eloquence and masculine sense, the talkers became listeners, the knot widened into a circle, and he himself was unconsciously the object of general attention and respect.

“And what think’ you of Mr Maltravers ?” asked Ferrers, carelessly ; “does he keep up your expectations ?”

Lady Florence had sunk into a reverie, and Ferrers repeated his question.

“He is younger than I imagined him,—and—and——”

“Handsome, I suppose, you mean.”

“No ! calmer and less animated.”

“He seems animated enough now,” said Ferrers ; “but your lady-like conversation failed in striking the Promethean spark. ‘Lay that flattering unction to your soul.’”

“Ah, you are right—he must have thought me very——”

“Beautiful, no doubt.”

“Beautiful !—I hate the word, Lumley. I wish I were not handsome—I might then get some credit for my intellect.”

“Humph !” said Ferrers, significantly.

“Oh, you don’t think so, sceptic,” said Florence, shaking her head, with a slight laugh and an altered manner.

“Does it matter what *I* think,” said Ferrers, with an attempted touch at the sentimental, “when Lord This, and Lord That, and Mr So-and-so, and Count What-d’ye-call-him, are all making their way to you, to dispossess me of my envied monopoly?”

While Ferrers spoke, several of the scattered loungers grouped around Florence, and the conversation of which she was the cynosure became animated and gay. Oh, how brilliant she was, that peerless Florence!—with what petulant and sparkling grace came wit and wisdom, and even genius, from those ruby lips! Even the assured Ferrers felt his subtle intellect as dull and coarse to hers, and shrank with a reluctant apprehension from the arrows of her careless and prodigal repartees. For there was a scorn in the nature of Florence Lascelles which made her wit pain more frequently than it pleased. Educated even to learning—courageous even to a want of feminacy—she delighted to sport with ignorance and pretension, even in the highest places; and the laugh that she excited was like lightning,—no one could divine where next it might fall.

But Florence, though dreaded and unloved, was yet courted, flattered, and the rage. For this there were two reasons; first, she was a coquette, and secondly, she was an heiress.

Thus the talkers in the room were divided into two principal groups, over one of which Maltravers may be said to have presided; over the other, Florence. As the former broke up, Ernest was joined by Cleveland.

“My dear cousin,” said Florence, suddenly, and in a whisper, as she turned to Lumley, “your friend is speaking of me—I see it. Go, I implore you, and let me know what he says!”

“The commission is not flattering,” said Ferrers, almost sullenly.

“Nay, a commission to gratify a woman’s curiosity is ever one of the most flattering embassies with which we can invest an able negotiator.”

“Well, I must do your bidding, though I disown the favour.” Ferrers moved away and joined Cleveland and Maltravers.

“She is, indeed, beautiful: so perfect a contour I never beheld; she is the only woman I ever saw in whom the aquiline features seem more classical than even the Greek.”

“So, that is your opinion of my fair cousin!” cried Ferrers; “you are caught.”

“I wish he were,” said Cleveland. “Ernest is now old enough to settle, and there is not a more dazzling prize in England—rich, high-born, lovely, and accomplished.”

“And what say you?” asked Lumley, almost impatiently, to Maltravers.

“That I never saw one whom I admire more or could love less,” replied Ernest, as he quitted the rooms.

Ferrers looked after him, and muttered to himself; he then rejoined Florence, who presently rose to depart, and, taking Lumley’s arm, said, “Well, I see my

father is looking round for me—and so for once I will forestall him. Come, Lumley, let us join him; I know he wants to see you.”

“Well,” said Florence, blushing deeply, and almost breathless, as they crossed the now half-empty apartments.

“Well, my cousin?”

“You provoke me—well, then, what said your friend?”

“That you deserved your reputation of beauty, but that you were not his style. Maltravers is in love, you know?”

“In love!”

“Yes, a pretty Frenchwoman! quite romantic—an attachment of some years’ standing.”

Florence turned away her face, and said no more.

“That’s a good fellow, Lumley,” said Lord Saxingham; “Florence is never more welcome to my eyes than at half-past one o’clock A.M., when I associate her with thoughts of my natural rest, and my unfortunate carriage-horses. By the by, I wish you would dine with me next Saturday.”

“Saturday: unfortunately, I am engaged to my uncle.”

“Oh! he has behaved handsomely to you?”

“Yes.”

“Mrs Templeton pretty well?”

“I fancy so.”

“As ladies wish to be, &c.?” whispered his lordship.

“No, thank Heaven!”

“ Well, if the old man could but make you his heir, we might think twice about the title.”

“ My dear lord, stop ! one favour—write me a line to hint that delicately.”

“ No—no letters ; letters always get into the papers.”

“ But cautiously worded—no danger of publication, on my honour.”

“ I'll think of it. Good-night.”

BOOK VII.

Χρὴ ὡς ἄριστον μὲν αὐτὸν πειρᾶσθαι γινέσθαι, μὴ μόνον δὲ αὐτὸν νομίζειν ἄριστον δύνασθαι γενέσθαι, &c.—PLOTIN. EN. 11, lib. ix. c. 9.

Every man should strive to be as good as possible, but not suppose himself to be the only thing that is good.

BOOK VII.

CHAPTER I.

Deceit is the strong but subtile chain which runs through all the members of a society, and links them together; trick or be tricked, is the alternative; 'tis the way of the world, and without it intercourse would drop.—*Anonymous Writer of 1722.*

A lovely child she was, of looks serene,
And motions which o'er things indifferent shed
The grace and gentleness from whence they came.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.

His years but young, but his experience old.—SHAKESPEARE.

He after honour hunts, I after love.—*Ibid.*

LUMLEY FERRERS was one of the few men in the world who act upon a profound, deliberate, and organised system—he had done so even from a boy. When he was twenty-one, he had said to himself, “Youth is the season for enjoyment: the triumphs of manhood, the wealth of age, do not compensate for a youth spent in unpleasurable toils.” Agreeably to this maxim, he had resolved not to adopt any profession; and being fond of travel, and of a restless temper, he had indulged abroad in all the gratifications that his moderate in-

come could afford him : that income went farther on the Continent than at home, which was another reason for the prolongation of his travels. Now, when the whims and passions of youth were sated — and, ripened by a consummate and various knowledge of mankind, his harder capacities of mind became developed and centred into such ambition as it was his nature to conceive—he acted no less upon a regular and methodical plan of conduct, which he carried into details. He had little or nothing within himself to cross his cold theories by contradictory practice ; for he was curbed by no principles, and regulated but by few tastes : and our tastes are often checks as powerful as our principles. Looking round the English world, Ferrers saw, that at his age and with an equivocal position, and no chances to throw away, it was necessary that he should cast off all attributes of the character of the wanderer and the *garçon*.

“There is nothing respectable in lodgings and a cab,” said Ferrers to himself—that “*self*” was his grand confidant !—“nothing stationary. Such are the appliances of a here-to-day-gone-to-morrow kind of life. One never looks substantial till one pays rates and taxes, and has a bill with one’s butcher !”

Accordingly, without saying a word to anybody, Ferrers took a long lease of a large house, in one of those quiet streets that proclaim the owners do not wish to be made by fashionable situations—streets in which, if you have a large house, it is supposed to be because you can afford one. He was very particular in

its being a respectable street—Great George Street, Westminster, was the one he selected.

No frippery or baubles, common to the mansions of young bachelors—no buhl, and marquetricie, and Sèvres china, and cabinet pictures, distinguished the large dingy drawing-rooms of Lumley Ferrers. He bought all the old furniture a bargain of the late tenant—tea-coloured chintz curtains, and chairs and sofas that were venerable and solemn with the accumulated dust of twenty-five years. The only things about which he was particular were a very long dining-table that would hold four-and-twenty, and a new mahogany sideboard. Somebody asked him why he cared about such articles. “I don’t know,” said he, “but I observe all respectable family-men do—there must be something in it—I shall discover the secret by-and-by.”

In this house did Mr Ferrers ensconce himself with two middle-aged maid-servants, and a man out of livery, whom he chose from a multitude of candidates, because the man looked especially well fed.

Having thus settled himself, and told every one that the lease of his house was for sixty-three years, Lumley Ferrers made a little calculation of his probable expenditure, which he found, with good management, might amount to about one-fourth more than his income.

“I shall take the surplus out of my capital,” said he, “and try the experiment for five years ; if it don’t do, and pay me profitably, why then either men are not to be lived upon, or Lumley Ferrers is a much duller dog than he thinks himself !”

Mr Ferrers had deeply studied the character of his uncle, as a prudent speculator studies the qualities of a mine in which he means to invest his capital, and much of his present proceedings was intended to act upon the uncle as well as upon the world. He saw that the more he could obtain for himself, not a noisy, social, fashionable reputation, but a good, sober, substantial one, the more highly Mr Templeton would consider him, and the more likely he was to be made his uncle's heir,—that is, provided Mrs Templeton did not supersede the nepotal parasite by indigenous olive-branches. This last apprehension died away as time passed, and no signs of fertility appeared. And, accordingly, Ferrers thought he might prudently hazard more upon the game on which he now ventured to rely. There was one thing, however, that greatly disturbed his peace: Mr Templeton, though harsh and austere in his manner to his wife, was evidently attached to her; and, above all, he cherished the fondest affection for his daughter-in-law. He was as anxious for her health, her education, her little childish enjoyments, as if he had been not only her parent, but a very doting one. He could not bear her to be crossed or thwarted. Mr Templeton, who had never spoiled anything before, not even an old pen (so careful, and calculating, and methodical was he), did his best to spoil this beautiful child, whom he could not even have the vain luxury of thinking he had produced to the admiring world. Softly, exquisitely lovely was that little girl; and every day she increased in the charm of her person, and in

the caressing fascination of her childish ways. Her temper was so sweet and docile, that fondness and petting, however injudiciously exhibited, only seemed yet more to bring out the colours of a grateful and tender nature. Perhaps the measured kindness of more reserved affection might have been the true way of spoiling one whose instincts were all for exacting and returning love. She was a plant that suns less warm might have nipped and chilled. But beneath an uncapricious and unclouded sunshine she sprang up in a luxurious bloom of heart and sweetness of disposition.

Every one, even those who did not generally like children, delighted in this charming creature, excepting only Mr Lumley Ferrers. But that gentleman, less mild than Pope's Narcissa,—

“To make a wash, had gladly stewed the child!”

He had seen how very common it is for a rich man, married late in life, to leave everything to a young widow and her children by her former marriage, when once attached to the latter; and he sensibly felt that he himself had but a slight hold over Templeton by the chain of the affections. He resolved, therefore, as much as possible, to alienate his uncle from his young wife; trusting, that as the influence of the wife was weakened, that of the child would be lessened also; and to raise in Templeton's vanity and ambition an ally that might supply to himself the want of love. He pursued his twofold scheme with masterly art and address. He first sought to secure the confidence and

regard of the melancholy and gentle mother ; and in this—for she was peculiarly unsuspecting and inexperienced—he obtained signal and complete success. His frankness of manner, his deferential attention, the art with which he warded off from her the spleen or ill-humour of Mr Templeton, the cheerfulness that his easy gaiety threw over a very gloomy house, made the poor lady hail his visits and trust in his friendship. Perhaps she was glad of any interruption to *tête-à-têtes* with a severe and ungenial husband, who had no sympathy for the sorrows, of whatever nature they might be, which preyed upon her, and who made it a point of morality to find fault wherever he could.

The next step in Lumley's policy was to arm Templeton's vanity against his wife, by constantly refreshing his consciousness of the sacrifices he had made by marriage, and the certainty that he would have attained all his wishes had he chosen more prudently. By perpetually, but most judiciously, rubbing this sore point, he, as it were, fixed the irritability into Templeton's constitution, and it reacted on all his thoughts, aspiring or domestic. Still, however, to Lumley's great surprise and resentment, while Templeton cooled to his wife, he only warmed to her child. Lumley had not calculated enough upon the thirst and craving for affection in most human hearts ; and Templeton, though not exactly an amiable man, had some excellent qualities ; if he had less sensitively regarded the opinion of the world, he would neither have contracted the vocabulary of cant, nor sickened for a peerage—both his affectation of

sainthood, and his gnawing desire of rank, arose from an extraordinary and morbid deference to opinion, and a wish for worldly honours and respect, which he felt that his mere talents could not secure to him. But he was, at bottom, a kindly man—charitable to the poor, considerate to his servants, and had within him the want to love and be loved, which is one of the desires wherewith the atoms of the universe are cemented and harmonised. Had Mrs Templeton evinced *love to him*, he might have defied all Lumley's diplomacy, been consoled for worldly disadvantages, and been a good and even uxorious husband. But she evidently did not love him, though an admirable, patient, provident wife; and her daughter *did* love him—love him as well even as she loved her mother; and the hard worldling would not have accepted a kingdom as the price of that little fountain of pure and ever-refreshing tenderness. Wise and penetrating as Lumley was, he never could thoroughly understand this weakness, as he called it: for we never know men entirely, unless we have complete sympathies with men in all their natural emotions; and Nature had left the workmanship of Lumley Ferrers unfinished and incomplete, by denying him the possibility of caring for anything but himself.

His plan for winning Templeton's esteem and deference was, however, completely triumphant. He took care that nothing in his *ménage* should appear "*extravagant*;" all was sober, quiet, and well regulated. He declared that he had so managed as to live within

his income ; and Templeton receiving no hint for money, nor aware that Ferrers had on the Continent consumed a considerable portion of his means, believed him. Ferrers gave a great many dinners, but he did not go on that foolish plan which has been laid down by persons who pretend to know life, as a means of popularity—he did not profess to give dinners better than other people. He knew that, unless you are a very rich or a very great man, no folly is equal to that of thinking that you soften the hearts of your friends by soups *à la bisque*, and Johannisberg at a guinea a bottle ! They all go away, saying, “ What right has that d——d fellow to give a better dinner than we do ? What horrid taste ! What ridiculous presumption ! ”

No ; though Ferrers himself was a most scientific epicure, and held the luxury of the palate at the highest possible price, he dieted his friends on what he termed “ *respectable fare*.” His cook put plenty of flour into the oyster-sauce ; cod’s-head and shoulders made his invariable fish ; and four *entrées*, without flavour or pretence, were duly supplied by the pastrycook, and carefully eschewed by the host. Neither did Mr Ferrers affect to bring about him gay wits and brilliant talkers. He confined himself to men of substantial consideration, and generally took care to be himself the cleverest person present ; while he turned the conversation on serious matters crammed for the occasion—politics, stocks, commerce, and the criminal code. Pruning his gaiety, though he retained his frankness, he sought to be known as a highly-informed, painstaking-

ing man, who would be sure to rise. His connections, and a certain nameless charm about him, consisting chiefly in a pleasant countenance, a bold yet winning candour, and the absence of all *hauteur* or pretence, enabled him to assemble round this plain table, which, if it gratified no taste, wounded no self-love, a sufficient number of public men of rank, and eminent men of business, to answer his purpose. The situation he had chosen, so near the Houses of Parliament, was convenient to politicians, and, by degrees, the large dingy drawing-rooms became a frequent resort for public men to talk over those thousand underplots by which a party is served or attacked. Thus, though not in parliament himself, Ferrers became insensibly associated with parliamentary men and things; and the ministerial party, whose politics he espoused, praised him highly, made use of him, and meant some day or other to do something for him.

While the career of this able and unprincipled man thus opened—and of course the opening was not made in a day—Ernest Maltravers was ascending, by a rough, thorny, and encumbered path, to that eminence on which the monuments of men are built. His success in public life was not brilliant nor sudden. For though he had eloquence and knowledge, he disdained all oratorical devices; and though he had passion and energy, he could scarcely be called a warm partisan. He met with much envy, and many obstacles; and the gracious and buoyant sociality of temper and manners, that had, in early youth, made him the idol of his contempor-

aries at school or college, had long since faded away into a cold, settled, and lofty, though gentle reserve, which did not attract towards him the animal spirits of the herd. But though he spoke seldom, and heard many, with half his powers, more enthusiastically cheered, he did not fail of commanding attention and respect ; and though no darling of cliques and parties, yet in that great body of the people who were ever the audience and tribunal to which, in letters or in politics, Maltravers appealed, there was silently growing up, and spreading wide, a belief in his upright intentions, his unpurchasable honour, and his correct and well-considered views. He felt that his name was safely invested, though the return for the capital was slow and moderate. He was contented to abide his time.

Every day he grew more attached to that only true philosophy which makes a man, as far as the world will permit, a world to himself ; and from the height of a tranquil and serene self-esteem, he felt the sun shine above him, when malignant clouds spread sullen and ungenial below. He did not despise or wilfully shock opinion, neither did he fawn upon and flatter it. Where he thought the world should be humoured, he humoured—where contemned, he contemned it. There are many cases in which an honest, well-educated, high-hearted individual is a much better judge than the multitude of what is right and what is wrong ; and in these matters he is not worth three straws if he suffer the multitude to bully or coax him out of his judgment. The Public, if you indulge it, is a most damnable gos-

ship, thrusting its nose into people's concerns, where it has no right to make or meddle ; and in those things where the Public is impertinent, Maltravers scorned and resisted its interference as haughtily as he would the interference of any insolent member of the insolent whole. It was this mixture of deep love and profound respect for the eternal PEOPLE, and of calm passionless disdain for that capricious charlatan, the momentary PUBLIC, which made Ernest Maltravers an original and solitary thinker ; and an actor, in reality modest and benevolent, in appearance arrogant and unsocial. " Pauperism, in contradistinction to poverty," he was wont to say, " is the dependence upon other people for existence, not on our own exertions ; there is a moral pauperism in the man who is dependent on others for that support of moral life—self-respect.

Wrapped in this philosophy, he pursued his haughty and lonesome way, and felt that in the deep heart of mankind, when prejudices and envies should die off, there would be a sympathy with his motives and his career. So far as his own health was concerned, the experiment had answered. No mere drudgery of business—late hours and dull speeches—can produce the dread exhaustion which follows the efforts of the soul to mount into the higher air of severe thought or intense imagination. Those faculties which had been overstrained now lay fallow, and the frame rapidly regained its tone. Of private comfort and inspiration Ernest knew but little. He gradually grew estranged from his old friend Ferrers, as their habits became opposed. Cleve-

land lived more and more in the country, and was too well satisfied with his quondam pupil's course of life and progressive reputation to trouble him with exhortation or advice. Cesarini had grown a literary lion, whose genius was vehemently lauded by all the reviews—on the same principle as that which induces us to praise foreign singers or dead men;—we must praise something, and we don't like to praise those who jostle ourselves. Cesarini had therefore grown prodigiously conceited—swore that England was the only country for true merit, and no longer concealed his jealous anger at the wider celebrity of Maltravers. Ernest saw him squandering away his substance, and prostituting his talents to drawing-room trifles, with a compassionate sigh. He sought to warn him, but Cesarini listened to him with such impatience that he resigned the office of monitor. He wrote to De Montaigne, who succeeded no better. Cesarini was bent on playing his own game. And to one game, without a metaphor, he had at last come. His craving for excitement vented itself at Hazard, and his remaining guineas melted daily away.

But De Montaigne's letters to Maltravers consoled him for the loss of less congenial friends. The Frenchman was now an eminent and celebrated man; and his appreciation of Maltravers was sweeter to the latter than would have been the huzzas of crowds. But, all this while, his vanity was pleased and his curiosity roused by the continued correspondence of his unseen Egeria. That correspondence (if so it may be called, being all on one side) had now gone on for a consider-

able time, and he was still wholly unable to discover the author : its tone had of late altered—it had become more sad and subdued—it spoke of the hollowness as well as the rewards of fame ; and, with a touch of true womanly sentiment, often hinted more at the rapture of soothing dejection than of sharing triumph. In all these letters, there was the undeniable evidence of high intellect and deep feeling ; they excited a strong and keen interest in Maltravers, yet the interest was not that which made him wish to discover, in order that he might love the writer. They were for the most part too full of the irony and bitterness of a *man's* spirit to fascinate one who considered that gentleness was the essence of a woman's strength. *Temper* spoke in them no less than mind and heart, and it was not the sort of temper which a man who loves women to be womanly could admire.

“I hear you often spoken of” (ran one of these strange epistles), “and I am almost equally angry whether fools presume to praise or to blame you. This miserable world we live in, how I loathe and disdain it!—yet I desire you to serve and to master it! Weak contradiction, effeminate paradox! Oh! rather a thousand times that you would fly from its mean temptations and poor rewards! If the desert were your dwelling-place and you wished one minister, I could renounce all—wealth, flattery, repute, womanhood—to serve you.

“I once admired you for your genius. My disease has fastened on me, and I now almost worship you for yourself. I have seen you, Ernest Maltravers—seen

you often, and when you never suspected that these eyes were on you. Now that I have seen, I understand you better. We cannot judge men by their books and deeds. Posterity can know nothing of the beings of the past. A thousand books never written—a thousand deeds never done—are in the eyes and lips of the few greater than the herd. In that cold, abstracted gaze, that pale and haughty brow, I read the disdain of obstacles, which is worthy of one who is confident of the goal. But my eyes fill with tears when I survey you!—you are sad, you are alone! If failures do not mortify you, success does not elevate. Oh, Maltravers, I, woman as I am, and living in a narrow circle, I, even I, know at last, that to have desires nobler, and ends more august, than others, is but to surrender waking life to morbid and melancholy dreams.

“Go more into the world, Maltravers—go more into the world, or quit it altogether. Your enemies must be met; they accumulate, they grow strong—you are too tranquil, too slow in your steps towards the prize which should be yours, to satisfy my impatience, to satisfy your friends. Be less refined in your ambition, that you may be more immediately useful. The feet of clay, after all, are the swiftest in the race. Even Lumley Ferrers will outstrip you if you do not take heed.

“Why do I run on thus?—you—you love another, yet you are not less the ideal that I could love—if I ever loved any one. You love—and yet—well, no matter.”

CHAPTER II.

Well, but this is being only an official nobleman. No matter, 'tis still being a nobleman, and that's his aim.—*Anonymous Writer of 1772.*

La musique est le seul des talens qui jouissent de lui-meme ; tous les autres veulent des temoins.*—MARMONTEL.

Thus the slow ox would gaudy trappings claim.—HORACE.

MR TEMPLETON had not obtained his peerage, and, though he had met with no direct refusal, nor made even a direct application to headquarters, he was growing sullen. He had great parliamentary influence, not close borough, illegitimate influence, but very proper orthodox influence of character, wealth, and so forth. He could return one member at least for a city, he could almost return one member for a county, and in three boroughs any activity on his part could turn the scale in a close contest. The ministers were strong, but still they could not afford to lose supporters hitherto zealous—the example of desertion is contagious. In the town which Templeton had formerly represented, and which he now almost commanded, a vacancy suddenly occurred—a candidate started on the

* Music is the sole talent which gives pleasure of itself ; all the others require witnesses.

opposition side and commenced a canvass ; to the astonishment and panic of the Secretary of the Treasury, Templeton put forward no one, and his interest remained dormant. Lord Saxingham hurried to Lumley.

“ My dear fellow, what is this ?—what can your uncle be about ? We shall lose this place—one of our strongholds. Bets run even.”

“ Why, you see, you have all behaved very ill to my uncle—I am really sorrow for it, but I can do nothing.”

“ What ! this confounded peerage ? Will that content him, and nothing short of it ? ”

“ Nothing.”

“ He must have it, by Jove ! ”

“ And even that may come too late.”

“ Ha ! do you think so ? ”

“ Will you leave the matter to me ? ”

“ Certainly ; you are a monstrous clever fellow, and we all esteem you.”

“ Sit down and write as I dictate, my dear lord.”

“ Well,” said Lord Saxingham, seating himself at Lumley’s enormous writing-table—“ well, go on.”

“ ‘ My dear Mr Templeton——’ ”

“ Too familiar,” said Lord Saxingham.

“ Not a bit ; go on.”

“ ‘ My dear Mr Templeton,—We are anxious to secure your parliamentary influence in C—— to the proper quarter—namely, to your own family—as the best defenders of the administration which you honour by your support. We wish signally, at the same time, to

express our confidence in your principles, and our gratitude for your countenance.' ”

“ D—d sour countenance ! ” muttered Lord Saxingham.

“ ‘ Accordingly, ’ ” continued Ferrers, “ ‘ as one whose connection with you permits the liberty, allow me to request that you will suffer our joint relation, Mr Ferrers, to be put into immediate nomination. ’ ”

Lord Saxingham threw down the pen and laughed for two minutes without ceasing. “ Capital, Lumley, capital !—Very odd I did not think of it before. ”

“ Each man for himself, and God for us all, ” returned Lumley, gravely : “ pray go on, my dear lord. ”

“ ‘ We are sure you could not have a representative that would more faithfully reflect your own opinions and our interests. One word more. A creation of p̄ers will probably take place in the spring, among which I am sure your name would be to his Majesty a gratifying addition ; the title will, of course, be secured to your sons—and failing the latter, to your nephew.—With great regard and respect, truly yours,

‘ SAXINGHAM. ’ ”

“ There, inscribe that ‘ Private and confidential, ’ and send it express to my uncle’s villa.

“ It shall be done, my dear Lumley—and this contents me as much as it does you. You are really a man to do us credit. You think it will be arranged ? ”

“ No doubt of it. ”

“ Well, good-day. Lumley, come to me when it is

all settled : Florence is always glad to see you ; she says no one amuses her more. And I am sure that is rare praise, for she is a strange girl—quite a Timon in petticoats.”

Away went Lord Saxingham.

“ Florence glad to see me ! ” said Lumley, throwing his arms behind him, and striding to and fro the room — “ Scheme the Second begins to smile upon me behind the advancing shadow of Scheme One. If I can but succeed in keeping away other suitors from my fair cousin until I am in a condition to propose myself, why I may carry off the greatest match in the three kingdoms. *Courage, mon brave Ferrers, courage !* ”

It was late that evening when Ferrers arrived at his uncle's villa. He found Mrs Templeton in the drawing-room seated at the piano. He entered gently ; she did not hear him, and continued at the instrument. Her voice was so sweet and rich, her taste so pure, that Ferrers, who was a good judge of music, stood in delighted surprise. Often as he had now been a visitor, even an inmate, at the house, he had never before heard Mrs Templeton play any but sacred airs, and this was one of the popular songs of sentiment. He perceived that her feeling at last overpowered her voice, and she paused abruptly, and, turning round, her face was so eloquent of emotion, that Ferrers was forcibly struck by its expression. He was not a man apt to feel curiosity for anything not immediately concerning himself ; but he did feel curious about this melancholy and beautiful woman. There was in her usual aspect that in-

expressible look of profound resignation which betokens a lasting remembrance of a bitter past : a prematurely blighted heart spoke in her eyes, her smile, her languid and joyless step. But she performed the routine of her quiet duties with a calm and conscientious regularity which showed that grief rather depressed than disturbed her thoughts. If her burden were heavy, custom seemed to have reconciled her to bear it without repining ; and the emotion which Ferrers now traced in her soft and harmonious features was of a nature he had only once witnessed before—viz., on the first night he had seen her, when poetry, which is the key of memory, had evidently opened a chamber haunted by mournful and troubled ghosts.

“ Ah ! dear madam,” said Ferrers, advancing, as he found himself discovered, “ I trust I do not disturb you. My visit is unseasonable ; but my uncle—where is he ? ”

“ He has been in town all the morning ; he said he should dine out, and I now expect him every minute.”

“ You have been endeavouring to charm away the sense of his absence. Dare I ask you to continue to play ? It is seldom that I hear a voice so sweet, and skill so consummate. You must have been instructed by the best Italian masters.”

“ No,” said Mrs Templeton, with a very slight colour in her delicate cheek—“ I learned young, and of one who loved music and felt it ; but who was not a foreigner.”

“ Will you sing me that song again?—you give the words a beauty I never discovered in them; yet they (as well as the music itself) are by my poor friend whom Mr Templeton does not like—Maltravers.”

“ Are they his also? ” said Mrs Templeton, with emotion; “ it is strange I did not know it. I heard the air in the streets, and it struck me much. I inquired the name of the song and bought it—it is very strange! ”

“ What is strange? ”

“ That there is a kind of language in your friend’s music and poetry which comes home to me, like words I have heard years ago! Is he young, this Mr Maltravers? ”

“ Yes, he is still young. ”

“ And, and—— ”

Here Mrs Templeton was interrupted by the entrance of her husband. He held the letter from Lord Saxingham—it was yet unopened. He seemed moody; but that was common with him. He coldly shook hands with Lumley, nodded to his wife, found fault with the fire, and throwing himself into his easy-chair, said, “ So, Lumley, I think I was a fool for taking your advice—and hanging back about this new election. I see by the evening papers that there is shortly to be a creation of peers. If I had shown activity on behalf of the government, I might have shamed them into gratitude. ”

“ I think I was right, sir, ” replied Lumley; “ public men are often alarmed into gratitude, seldom shamed

into it. Firm votes, like old friends, are most valued when we think we are about to lose them; but what is that letter in your hand?"

"Oh, some begging petition, I suppose."

"Pardon me—it has an official look."

Templeton put on his spectacles, raised the letter, examined the address and seal, hastily opened it, and broke into an exclamation very like an oath: when he had concluded—"Give me your hand, nephew—the thing is settled—I am to have the peerage. You were right—ha, ha!—my dear wife, you will be my lady, think of that—aren't you glad?—why don't your ladyship smile? Where's the child—where is she, I say?"

"Gone to bed, sir," said Mrs Templeton, half frightened.

"Gone to bed! I must go and kiss her. Gone to bed, has she? Light that candle, Lumley." (Here Mr Templeton rang the bell.) "John," said he, as the servant entered—"John, tell James to go the first thing in the morning to Baxter's, and tell him not to paint my chariot till he hears from me. I must go kiss the child—I must, really."

"D—— the child," muttered Lumley, as, after giving the candle to his uncle, he turned to the fire; "what the deuce has she got to do with the matter? Charming little girl—yours, madam! how I love her! My uncle dotes on her—no wonder!"

"He is, indeed, very, very fond of her," said Mrs Templeton, with a sigh that seemed to come from the depth of her heart.

“Did he take a fancy to her before you were married?”

“Yes, I believe—oh yes, certainly.”

“Her own father could not be more fond of her.”

Mrs Templeton made no answer, but lighted her candle, and, wishing Lumley good-night, glided from the room.

“I wonder if my grave aunt and my grave uncle took a bite at the apple before they bought the right of the tree. It looks suspicious; yet no; it can't be; there is nothing of the seducer or the seductive about the old fellow. It is not likely—here he comes.”

In came Templeton, and his eyes were moist, and his brow relaxed.

“And how is the little angel, sir?” asked Ferrers.

“She kissed me, though I woke her up; children are usually cross when wakened.”

“Are they?—little dears! Well, sir, so I was right, then; may I see the letter?”

“There it is.”

Ferrers drew his chair to the fire, and read his own production with all the satisfaction of an anonymous author.

“How kind!—how considerate!—how delicately put!—a double favour! But perhaps, after all, it does not express your wishes.”

“In what way?”

“Why—why—about myself.”

“*You!*—is there anything about *you* in it?—I did not observe *that*—let me see.”

“Uncles never selfish!—mem. for common-place book!” thought Ferrers.

The uncle knit his brows as he reperused the letter. “This won’t do, Lumley,” said he, very shortly, when he had done.

“A seat in parliament is too much honour for a poor nephew, then, sir!” said Lumley, very bitterly, though he did not feel at all bitter; but it was the proper tone—“I have done all in my power to advance your ambition, and you will not even lend a hand to forward me one step in my career. But, forgive me, sir, I have no right to expect it.”

“Lumley!” replied Templeton, kindly, “you mistake me. I think much more highly of you than I did—much: there is a steadiness, a sobriety about you most praiseworthy, and you shall go into parliament if you wish it; but not for C——. I will give my interest there to some other friend of the government, and in return they can give you a treasury borough! That is the same thing to you.”

Lumley was agreeably surprised—he pressed his uncle’s hand warmly, and thanked him cordially. Mr Templeton proceeded to explain to him that it was inconvenient and expensive, sitting for places where one’s family was known, and Lumley fully subscribed to all.

“As for the settlement of the peerage, that is all right,” said Templeton; and then he sank into a reverie, from which he broke joyously—“yes, that is all right. I have projects, objects—this may unite them all—

nothing can be better—you will be the next lord—what—I say, what title shall we have ?”

“Oh, take a sounding one—you have very little landed property, I think ?”

“Two thousand a-year in ——shire, bought a bargain.”

“What’s the name of the place ?”

“Grubley.”

“Lord Grubley !—Baron Grubley of Grubley—oh atrocious ! Who had the place before you ?”

“Bought it of Mr Sheepshanks—very old family.”

“But surely some old Norman once had the place ?”

“Norman, yes ! Henry II. gave it to his barber—Bertram Courval.”

“That’s it !—that’s it !—Lord de Courval—singular coincidence !—descent from the old line. Heralds’ College soon settle all that. Lord de Courval !—nothing can sound better. There must be a village or hamlet still called Courval about the property.”

“I am afraid not. There is Coddle End !”

“Coddle End !—Coddle End !—the very thing, sir—the very thing—clear corruption from Courval !—Lord de Courval of Courval !—Superb ! Ha ! ha !”

“Ha ! ha !” laughed Templeton, and he had hardly laughed before since he was thirty.

The relations sat long and conversed familiarly. Ferrers slept at the villa, and his sleep was sound, for he thought little of plans once formed and half executed ; it was the hunt that kept him awake, and he slept like a hound when the prey was down. Not so

Templeton, who did not close his eyes all night.—
“Yes, yes,” thought he, “I must get the fortune and the title in one line, by a prudent management. Ferrers deserves what I mean to do for him. Steady, good-natured, frank, and will get on—yes, yes, I see it all. Meanwhile I did well to prevent his standing for C——; might pick up gossip about Mrs T., and other things that might be unpleasant. Ah, I’m a shrewd fellow!”

CHAPTER III.

Lanzun. There, Marquis, there, I've done it.

Montespan. Done it! yes! Nice doings!

The Duchess de la Vallière.

LUMLEY hastened to strike while the iron was hot. The next morning he went straight to the Treasury—saw the managing secretary, a clever, sharp man, who, like Ferrers, carried off intrigue and manœuvre by a blunt, careless, bluff manner.

Ferrers announced that he was to stand for the free, respectable, open city of C——, with an electoral population of 2500—a very showy place it was for a member in the old, ante-reform times, and was considered a thoroughly independent borough. The secretary congratulated and complimented him.

“We have had losses lately in *our* elections among the larger constituencies,” said Lumley.

“We have indeed—three towns lost in the last six months. Members do die so very unseasonably!”

“Is Lord Staunch yet provided for?” asked Lumley. Now Lord Staunch was one of the popular show-fight great guns of the administration—not in office, but that most useful person to all governments, an out-

and-out supporter upon the most independent principles—who was known to have refused place, and to value himself on independence—a man who helped the government over the stile when it was seized with a temporary lameness, and who carried “great weight with him in the country.” Lord Staunch had foolishly thrown up a close borough in order to contest a large city, and had failed in the attempt. His failure was everywhere cited as a proof of the growing unpopularity of ministers.

“Is Lord Staunch yet provided for?” asked Lumley.

“Why, he must have his old seat—Three-Oaks. Three-Oaks is a nice, quiet little place; most respectable constituency—all Staunch’s own family.”

“Just the thing for him; yet, ’tis a pity that he did not wait to stand for C——; my uncle’s interest would have secured him.”

“Ay, I thought so the moment C—— was vacant. However, it is too late now.”

“It would be a great triumph if Lord Staunch could show that a large constituency volunteered to elect him without expense.”

“Without expense!—Ah, yes, indeed!—It would prove that purity of election still exists—that British institutions are still upheld.”

“It might be done, Mr ——”

“Why, I thought that you——”

“Were to stand—that is true—and it will be difficult to manage my uncle; but he loves me much—you

know I am his heir—I believe I could do it ; that is, if you think it would be *a very great* advantage to the party, and *a very great service* to the government.”

“ Why, Mr Ferrers, it would indeed be both.”

“ And in that case I could have Three-Oaks.”

“ I see—exactly so ; but to give up so respectable a seat—really it is a sacrifice.”

“ Say no more, it shall be done. A deputation shall wait on Lord Staunch directly. I will see my uncle, and a despatch shall be sent down to C—— to-night ; at least, I hope so. I must not be too confident. My uncle is an old man, nobody but myself can manage him ; I’ll go this instant.”

“ You may be sure your kindness will be duly appreciated.”

Lumley shook hands cordially with the secretary, and retired. The secretary was not “ humbugged,” nor did Lumley expect he should be. But the secretary noted this of Lumley Ferrers (and that gentleman’s object was gained), that Lumley Ferrers was a man who looked out for office, and if he did tolerably well in parliament, that Lumley Ferrers was a man who ought to be *pushed*.

Very shortly afterwards, the ‘Gazette’ announced the election of Lord Staunch for C——, after a sharp but decisive contest. The ministerial journals rang with exulting pæans ; the opposition ones called the electors of C—— all manner of hard names, and declared that Mr Stout, Lord Staunch’s opponent, would petition ;

which he never did. In the midst of the hubbub, Mr Lumley Ferrers quietly and unobservedly crept into the representation of Three-Oaks.

On the night of his election, he went to Lord Saxingham's; but what there happened deserves another chapter.

CHAPTER IV.

Je connois des princes du sang, des princes étrangers, des grands seigneurs, des ministres d'état, des magistrats, et des philosophes qui fileroient pour l'amour de vous. En pouvez-vous demander davantage?—*Lettres de Madame de Sévigné.*

Lindore. I—I believe it will choke me. I'm in love. . . .
Now hold your tongue. Hold your tongue, I say.

Dalner. You in love! Ha! ha!

Lind. There, he laughs.

Dal. No; I am really sorry for you.—*German Play (False Delicacy).*

What is here?

Gold.—SHAKESPEARE.

It happened that that evening Maltravers had, for the first time, accepted one of many invitations with which Lord Saxingham had honoured him. His lordship and Maltravers were of different political parties, nor were they in other respects adapted to each other. Lord Saxingham was a clever man in his way, but worldly even to a proverb among worldly people. That “man was born to walk erect and look upon the stars,” is an eloquent fallacy that Lord Saxingham might suffice to disprove. He seemed born to walk with a stoop; and if he ever looked upon any stars, they were those which

* I know princes of the blood, foreign princes, great lords, ministers of state, magistrates, and philosophers who would even spin for love of you. What can you ask more?

go with a garter. Though of celebrated and historical ancestry, great rank, and some personal reputation, he had all the ambition of a *parvenu*. He had a strong regard for office, not so much from the sublime affection for that sublime thing,—power over the destinies of a glorious nation, as because it added to that vulgar thing—importance in his own set. He looked on his cabinet uniform as a beadle looks on his gold lace. He also liked patronage, secured good things to distant connections, got on his family to the remotest degree of relationship; in short, he was of the earth, earthy. He did not comprehend Maltravers; and Maltravers, who every day grew prouder and prouder, despised him. Still Lord Saxingham was told that Maltravers was a rising man, and he thought it well to be civil to rising men, of whatever party; besides, his vanity was flattered by having men who are talked of in his train. He was too busy and too great a personage to think Maltravers could be other than sincere, when he declared himself, in his notes, “very sorry,” or “much concerned,” to forego the honour of dining with Lord Saxingham, on the, &c. &c.; and therefore continued his invitations, till Maltravers, from that fatality which undoubtedly regulates and controls us, at last accepted the proffered distinction.

He arrived late—most of the guests were assembled; and, after exchanging a few words with his host, Ernest fell back into the general group, and found himself in the immediate neighbourhood of Lady Florence Lascelles. This lady had never much pleased Maltravers, for he

was not fond of masculine or coquettish heroines, and Lady Florence seemed to him to merit both epithets ; therefore, though he had met her often since the first day he had been introduced to her, he had usually contented himself with a distant bow or a passing salutation. But now, as he turned round and saw her—she was, for a miracle, sitting alone—and in her most dazzling and noble countenance there was so evident an appearance of ill-health, that he was struck and touched by it. In fact, beautiful as she was, both in face and form, there was something in the eye and the bloom of Lady Florence, which a skilful physician would have seen with prophetic pain. And, whenever occasional illness paled the roses of the cheek, and sobered the play of the lips, even an ordinary observer would have thought of the old commonplace proverb — “that the brightest beauty has the briefest life.” It was some sentiment of this kind, perhaps, that now awakened the sympathy of Maltravers. He addressed her with more marked courtesy than usual, and took a seat by her side.

“You have been to the House, I suppose, Mr Maltravers ?” said Lady Florence.

“Yes, for a short time ; it is not one of our field nights—no division was expected ; and by this time, I dare say, the House has been counted out.”

“Do you like the life ?”

“It has excitement,” said Maltravers, evasively.

“And the excitement is of a noble character ?”

“Scarcely so, I fear—it is so made up of mean and malignant motives,—there is in it so much jealousy of

our friends, so much unfairness to our enemies ;—such readiness to attribute to others the basest objects,—such willingness to avail ourselves of the poorest stratagems ! The ends may be great, but the means are very ambiguous.”

“I knew *you* would feel this,” exclaimed Lady Florence, with a heightened colour.

“Did you ?” said Maltravers, rather interested as well as surprised. “I scarcely imagined it possible that you would deign to divine secrets so insignificant.”

“You did not do *me* justice, then,” returned Lady Florence, with an arch yet half-painful smile ; “for—but I was about to be impertinent.”

“Nay, say on.”

“For—then—I do not imagine you to be one apt to do injustice to yourself.”

“Oh ! you consider me presumptuous and arrogant ; but that is common report, and you do right, perhaps, to believe it.”

“Was there ever any one unconscious of his own merit ?” asked Lady Florence, proudly. “They who distrust themselves have good reason for it.”

“You seek to cure the wound you inflicted,” returned Maltravers, smiling.

“No ; what I said was an apology for myself as well as for you. You need no words to vindicate you ; you are a man, and can bear out all arrogance with the royal motto—*Dieu et mon droit*. With you, deeds can support pretension ; but I am a woman—it was a mistake of Nature !”

“But what triumphs that man can achieve bring so immediate, so palpable a reward as those won by a woman, beautiful and admired—who finds every room an empire, and every class her subjects?”

“It is a despicable realm.”

“What!—to command—to win—to bow to your worship—the greatest, and the highest, and the sternest; to own slaves in those whom men recognise as their lords! Is such a power despicable? If so, what power is to be envied?”

Lady Florence turned quickly round to Maltravers, and fixed on him her large dark eyes, as if she would read into his very heart. She turned away with a blush and a slight frown—“There is mockery on your lip,” said she.

Before Maltravers could answer, dinner was announced, and a foreign ambassador claimed the hand of Lady Florence. Maltravers saw a young lady, with gold oats in her very light hair, fall to his lot, and descended to the dining-room, thinking more of Lady Florence Lascelles than he had ever done before.

He happened to sit nearly opposite to the young mistress of the house (Lord Saxingham, as the reader knows, was a widower, and Lady Florence an only child); and Maltravers was that day in one of those felicitous moods in which our animal spirits search, and carry up, as it were, to the surface, our intellectual gifts and acquisitions. He conversed generally and happily; but once, when he turned his eyes to appeal to Lady Florence for her opinion on some point in dis-

cussion, he caught her gaze fixed upon him with an expression that checked the current of his gaiety, and cast him into a curious and bewildered reverie. In that gaze there was earnest and cordial admiration; but it was mixed with so much mournfulness, that the admiration lost its eloquence, and he who noticed it was rather saddened than flattered.

After dinner, when Maltravers sought the drawing-rooms, he found them filled with the customary mob of good society. In one corner he discovered Castruccio Cesarini, playing on a guitar, slung across his breast with a blue ribbon. The Italian sang well: many young ladies were grouped round him, amongst others Florence Lascelles. Maltravers, fond as he was of music, looked upon Castruccio's performance as a disagreeable exhibition. He had a Quixotic idea of the dignity of talent; and though himself of a musical science, and a melody of voice that would have thrown the room into ecstasies, he would as soon have turned juggler or tumbler for polite amusement, as contended for the bravos of a drawing-room. It was because he was one of the proudest men in the world, that Maltravers was one of the least *vain*. He did not care a rush for applause in small things. But Cesarini would have summoned the whole world to see him play at push-pin, if he thought he played it well.

"Beautiful! divine! charming!" cried the young ladies, as Cesarini ceased; and Maltravers observed that Florence praised more earnestly than the rest, and that

Cesarini's dark eyes sparkled, and his pale cheek flushed with unwonted brilliancy. Florence turned to Maltravers, and the Italian, following her eyes, frowned darkly.

"You know the Signor Cesarini," said Florence, joining Maltravers. "He is an interesting and gifted person."

"Unquestionably. I grieve to see him wasting his talents upon a soil that may yield a few short-lived flowers without one useful plant or productive fruit."

"He enjoys the passing hour, Mr Maltravers; and sometimes, when I see the mortifications that await sterner labour, I think he is right."

"Hush!" said Maltravers; "his eyes are on us—he is listening breathlessly for every word you utter. I fear that you have made an unconscious conquest of a poet's heart; and if so, he purchases the enjoyment of the passing hour at a fearful price."

"Nay," said Lady Florence, indifferently, "he is one of those to whom the fancy supplies the place of the heart. And if I give him an inspiration, it will be an equal luxury to him whether his lyre be strung to hope or disappointment. The sweetness of his verses will compensate to him for any bitterness in actual life."

"There are two kinds of love," answered Maltravers,—"love and self-love; the wounds of the last are often most incurable in those who appear least vulnerable to the first. Ah, Lady Florence, were I privileged to play the monitor, I would venture on one warning, however much it might offend you."

"And that is——"

“To forbear coquetry.”

Maltravers smiled as he spoke, but it was gravely—and at the same time he moved gently away. But Lady Florence laid her hand on his arm.

“Mr Maltravers,” said she, very softly, and with a kind of faltering in her tone, “am I wrong to say that I am anxious for your good opinion? Do not judge me harshly. I am soured, discontented, unhappy. I have no sympathy with the world. These men whom I see around me—what are they? the mass of them unfeeling and silken egotists—ill-judging, ill-educated, well-dressed: the few who are called distinguished—how selfish in their ambition, how passionless in their pursuits! Am I to be blamed if I sometimes exert a power over such as these, which rather proves my scorn of them than my own vanity?”

“I have no right to argue with you.”

“Yes, argue with me, convince me, guide me—Heaven knows that, impetuous and haughty as I am, I need a guide,”—and Lady Florence’s eyes swam with tears. Ernest’s prejudices against her were greatly shaken: he was even somewhat dazzled by her beauty, and touched by her unexpected gentleness; but still, his heart was not assailed, and he replied almost coldly, after a short pause—

“Dear Lady Florence, look round the world—who so much to be envied as yourself? What sources of happiness and pride are open to you! Why, then, make to yourself causes of discontent?—why be scornful of those who cross not your path? Why not look

with charity upon God's less endowed children, beneath you as they may seem? What consolation have you in hurting the hearts or the vanities of others? Do you raise yourself even in your own estimation? You affect to be above your sex—yet what character do you despise more in women than that which you assume? Semiramis should not be a coquette! There now, I have offended you—I confess I am very rude.”

“I am not offended,” said Florence, almost struggling with her tears; and she added inly, “Ah, I am too happy!” There are some lips from which even the proudest women love to hear the censure which appears to disprove indifference.

It was at this time that Lumley Ferrers, flushed with the success of his schemes and projects, entered the room; and his quick eye fell upon that corner, in which he detected what appeared to him a very alarming flirtation between his rich cousin and Ernest Maltravers. He advanced to the spot, and, with his customary frankness, extended a hand to each.

“Ah, my dear and fair cousin, give me your congratulations, and ask me for my first frank, to be bound up in a collection of autographs by distinguished senators—it will sell high one of these days. Your most obedient, Mr Maltravers;—how we shall laugh in our sleeves at the humbug of politics, when you and I, the best friends in the world, sit *vis-à-vis* on opposite benches! But why, Lady Florence, have you never introduced me to your pet Italian? *Allons!* I am his match in Alfieri, whom, of course, he swears by, and

whose verses, by the way, seem cut out of boxwood—the hardest material for turning off that sort of machinery that invention ever hit on.”

Thus saying, Ferrers contrived, as he thought, very cleverly, to divide a pair that he much feared were justly formed to meet by nature—and, to his great joy, Maltravers shortly afterwards withdrew.

Ferrers, with the happy ease that belonged to his complacent, though plotting character, soon made Cesarini at home with him ; and two or three slighting expressions which the former dropped with respect to Maltravers, coupled with some outrageous compliments to the Italian, completely won the heart of the poet. The brilliant Florence was more silent and subdued than usual ; and her voice was softer, though graver, when she replied to Castruccio's eloquent appeals. Castruccio was one of those men who *talk fine*. By degrees, Lumley lapsed into silence, and listened to what took place between Lady Florence and the Italian, while appearing to be deep in 'The Views of the Rhine,' which lay on the table.

“Ah,” said the latter, in his soft native tongue, “could you know how I watch every shade of that countenance which makes my heaven ! Is it clouded ? night is with me !—is it radiant ? I am as the Persian gazing on the sun !”

“Why do you speak thus to me ? were you not a poet I might be angry.”

“You were not angry when the English poet, that cold Maltravers, spoke to you perhaps as boldly.”

Lady Florence drew up her haughty head. "Signor," said she, checking, however, her first impulse, and with mildness, "Mr Maltravers neither flatters nor——"

"Presumes, you were about to say," said Cesarini, grinding his teeth. "But it is well—once you were less chilling to the utterance of my deep devotion."

"Never, Signor Cesarini, never—but when I thought it was but the common gallantry of your nation: let me think so still."

"No, proud woman," said Cesarini, fiercely, "no—hear the truth."

Lady Florence rose indignantly.

"Hear me," he continued. "I—I, the poor foreigner, the despised minstrel, dare to lift up my eyes to you! I love you!"

Never had Florence Lascelles been so humiliated and confounded. However she might have amused herself with the vanity of Cesarini, she had not given him, as she thought, the warrant to address her—the great Lady Florence, the prize of dukes and princes—in this hardy manner; she almost fancied him insane. But the next moment she recalled the warning of Maltravers, and felt as if her punishment had commenced.

"You will think and speak more calmly, sir, when we meet again," and so saying she swept away.

Cesarini remained rooted to the spot, with his dark countenance expressing such passions as are rarely seen in the aspect of civilised men.

"Where do you lodge, Signor Cesarini?" asked the

bland, familiar voice of Ferrers. "Let us walk part of the way together—that is, when you are tired of these hot rooms."

Cesarini groaned. "You are ill," continued Ferrers; "the air will revive you—come." He glided from the room, and the Italian mechanically followed him. They walked together for some moments in silence, side by side, in a clear, lovely, moonlight night. At length Ferrers said, "Pardon me, my dear signor, but you may already have observed that I am a very frank, odd sort of fellow. I see you are caught by the charms of my cruel cousin. Can I serve you in any way?"

A man at all acquainted with the world in which we live would have been suspicious of such cordiality in the cousin of an heiress, towards a very unsuitable aspirant. But Cesarini, like many indifferent poets (but like few good ones), had no common sense. He thought it quite natural that a man who admired his poetry so much as Lumley had declared he did, should take a lively interest in his welfare; and he therefore replied warmly, "Oh, sir, this is indeed a crushing blow: I dreamed she loved me. She was ever flattering and gentle when she spoke to me, and in verse already I had told her of my love, and met with no rebuke."

"Did your verses really and plainly declare love, and in your own person?"

"Why, the sentiment was veiled, perhaps—put into the mouth of a fictitious character, or conveyed in an allegory."

"Oh!" ejaculated Ferrers, thinking it very likely

that the gorgeous Florence, hymned by a thousand bards, had done little more than cast a glance over the lines that had cost poor Cesarini such anxious toil, and inspired him with such daring hope. "Oh!—and to-night she was more severe!—she is a terrible coquette, *la belle Florence!* But perhaps you have a rival."

"I feel it—I saw it—I know it!"

"Whom do you suspect?"

"That accursed Maltravers! He crosses me in every path—my spirit quails beneath his whenever we encounter. I read my doom."

"If it be Maltravers," said Ferrers, gravely, "the danger cannot be great. Florence has seen but little of him, and he does not admire her much; but she is a great match, and he is ambitious. We must guard against this betimes, Cesarini—for know that I dislike Maltravers as much as you do, and will cheerfully aid you in any plan to blight his hopes in that quarter."

"Generous, noble friend!—yet he is richer, better-born than I."

"That may be; but to one in Lady Florence's position, all minor grades of rank in her aspirants seem pretty well levelled. Come, I don't tell you that I would not sooner she married a countryman and an equal—but I have taken a liking to you, and I detest Maltravers. She is very romantic—fond of poetry to a passion—writes it herself, I fancy. Oh, you'll just suit her; but, alas! how will you see her?"

"See her! What mean you?"

"Why, have you not declared love to-night? I

thought I overheard you. Can you for a moment fancy that, after such an avowal, Lady Florence will again receive you—that is, if she mean to reject your suit?”

“Fool that I was! But no—she must, she shall.”

“Be persuaded: in this country violence will not do. Take my advice, write an humble apology, confess your fault, invoke her pity; and, declaring that you renounce for ever the character of a lover, implore still to be acknowledged as a friend. Be quiet now, hear me out; I am older than you; I know my cousin; this will pique her; your modesty will soothe, while your coldness will arouse, her vanity. Meanwhile you will watch the progress of Maltravers; I will be by your elbow; and between us, to use a homely phrase, we will do for him. Then you may have your opportunity, clear stage, and fair play.”

Cesarini was at first rebellious; but, at length, even he saw the policy of the advice. But Lumley would not leave him till the advice was adopted. He made Castruccio accompany him to a club, dictated the letter to Florence, and undertook its charge. This was not all.

“It is also necessary,” said Lumley, after a short but thoughtful silence, “that you should write to Maltravers.”

“And for what?”

“I have my reasons. Ask him, in a frank and friendly spirit, his opinion of Lady Florence; state your belief that she loves you, and inquire ingenuously

what he thinks your chances of happiness in such a union."

"But why this?"

"His answer may be useful," returned Lumley, musingly. "Stay, I will dictate the letter."

Cesarini wondered and hesitated, but there was that about Lumley Ferrers which had already obtained command over the weak and passionate poet. He wrote, therefore, as Lumley dictated, beginning with some commonplace doubts as to the happiness of marriage in general, excusing himself for his recent coldness towards Maltravers, and asking him his confidential opinion both as to Lady Florence's character and his own chances of success.

This letter, like the former one, Lumley sealed and despatched.

"You perceive," he then said, briefly, to Cesarini, "that it is the object of this letter to entrap Maltravers into some plain and honest avowal of his dislike to Lady Florence; we may make good use of such expressions hereafter, if he should ever prove a rival. And now go home to rest: you look exhausted. Adieu, my new friend."

"I have long had a presentiment," said Lumley to his councillor SELF, as he walked to Great George Street, "that that wild girl has conceived a romantic fancy for Maltravers. But I can easily prevent such an accident ripening into misfortune. Meanwhile I have secured a tool, if I want one. By Jove, what an ass that poet is! But so was Cassio; yet Iago made use of him. If

Iago had been born now, and dropped that foolish fancy for revenge, what a glorious fellow he would have been ! Prime minister at least !”

Pale, haggard, exhausted, Castruccio Cesarini, traversing a length of way, arrived at last at a miserable lodging in the suburb of Chelsea. His fortune was now gone ; gone in supplying the poorest food to a craving and imbecile vanity ; gone, that its owner might seem what nature never meant him for—the elegant Lothario, the graceful man of pleasure, the troubadour of modern life ! gone in horses, and jewels, and fine clothes, and gaming, and printing unsaleable poems on gilt-edged vellum ; gone, that he might be not a greater but a more fashionable man than Ernest Maltravers ! Such is the common destiny of those poor adventurers who confine fame to boudoirs and saloons. No matter whether they be poets or dandies, wealthy *parvenus* or aristocratic cadets, all equally prove the adage that the wrong paths to reputation are strewn with the wrecks of peace, fortune, happiness, and too often honour ! And yet this poor young man had dared to hope for the hand of Florence Lascelles ! He had the common notion of foreigners, that English girls marry for love, are very romantic ; that, within the three seas, heiresses are as plentiful as blackberries ; and for the rest, his vanity had been so pampered, that it now insinuated itself into every fibre of his intellectual and moral system.

Cesarini looked cautiously round, as he arrived at his door ; for he fancied that, even in that obscure place, persons might be anxious to catch a glimpse of the

celebrated poet ; and he concealed his residence from all ; dined on a roll when he did not dine out, and left his address at "The Travellers." He looked round, I say, and he did observe a tall figure, wrapped in a cloak, that had indeed followed him from a distant and more populous part of the town. But the figure turned round, and vanished instantly. Cesarini mounted to his second floor. And about the middle of the next day a messenger left a letter at his door, containing one hundred pounds in a blank envelope. Cesarini knew not the writing of the address ; his pride was deeply wounded. Amidst all his penury, he had not even applied to his own sister. Could it come from her, from De Montaigne ? He was lost in conjecture. He put the remittance aside for a few days, for he had something fine in him, the poor poet ! but bills grew pressing, and necessity hath no law.

Two days afterwards, Cesarini brought to Ferrers the answer he had received from Maltravers. Lumley had rightly foreseen that the high spirit of Ernest would conceive some indignation at the coquetry of Florence in beguiling the Italian into hopes never to be realised, that he would express himself openly and warmly. He did so, however, with more gentleness than Lumley had anticipated.

"This is not exactly the thing," said Ferrers, after twice reading the letter ; "still it may hereafter be a strong card in our hands—we will keep it."

So saying, he locked up the letter in his desk, and Cesarini soon forgot its existence.

CHAPTER V.

She was a phantom of delight,
When first she gleamed upon my sight ;
A lovely apparition sent,
To be a moment's ornament.—WORDSWORTH.

MALTRAVERS did not see Lady Florence again for some weeks ; meanwhile, Lumley Ferrers made his *début* in parliament. Rigidly adhering to his plan of acting on a deliberate system, and not prone to overrate himself, Mr Ferrers did not, like most promising new members, try the hazardous ordeal of a great first speech. Though bold, fluent, and ready, he was not eloquent ; and he knew that on great occasions, when great speeches are wanted, great guns like to have the fire to themselves. Neither did he split upon the opposite rock of “promising young men,” who stick to “the business of the house” like leeches, and quibble on details ; in return for which labour, they are generally voted bores, who can never do anything remarkable. But he spoke frequently, shortly, courageously, and with a strong dash of good-humoured personality. He was the man whom a minister could get to say something which other people did not like to say ; and he did so with a frank

fearlessness that carried off any seeming violation of good taste. He soon became a very popular speaker in the parliamentary clique ; especially with the gentlemen who crowd the bar, and never want to hear the argument of the debate. Between him and Maltravers a visible coldness now existed ; for the latter looked upon his old friend (whose principles of logic led him even to republicanism, and who had been accustomed to accuse Ernest of temporising with plain truths, if he demurred to their application to artificial states of society) as a cold-blooded and hypocritical adventurer ; while Ferrers, seeing that Ernest could now be of no further use to him, was willing enough to drop a profitless intimacy. Nay, he thought it would be wise to pick a quarrel with him, if possible, as the best means of banishing a supposed rival from the house of his noble relation, Lord Saxingham. But no opportunity for that step presented itself ; so Lumley kept a fit of convenient rudeness, or an impromptu sarcasm, in reserve, if ever it should be wanted.

The season and the session were alike drawing to a close, when Maltravers received a pressing invitation from Cleveland to spend a week at his villa, which he assured Ernest would be full of agreeable people ; and as all business productive of debate or division was over, Maltravers was glad to obtain fresh air and a change of scene. Accordingly, he sent down his luggage and favourite books, and, one afternoon in early August, rode alone towards Temple Grove. He was much dissatisfied, perhaps disappointed, with his experience of public

life ; and with his high-wrought and over-refining views of the deficiencies of others more prominent, he was in a humour to mingle also censure of himself, for having yielded too much to the doubts and scruples that often, in the early part of their career, beset the honest and sincere, in the turbulent whirl of politics, and ever tend to make the robust hues that should belong to action

“Sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought.”

His mind was working its way slowly towards those conclusions, which sometimes ripen the best practical men out of the most exalted theorists, and perhaps he saw before him the pleasing prospect flatteringly exhibited to another, when he complained of being too honest for party, viz., of “becoming a very pretty rascal in time !”

For several weeks he had not heard from his unknown correspondent, and the time was come when he missed those letters, now continued for more than two years ; and which, in their eloquent mixture of complaint, exhortation, despondent gloom, and declamatory enthusiasm, had often soothed him in dejection, and made him more sensible of triumph. While revolving in his mind thoughts connected with these subjects—and, somehow or other, with his more ambitious reveries were always mingled musings of curiosity respecting his correspondent—he was struck by the beauty of a little girl, of about eleven years old, who was walking with a female attendant on the footpath that skirted the road. I said that he was struck by her beauty, but

that is a wrong expression ; it was rather the charm of her countenance than the perfection of her features which arrested the gaze of Maltravers—a charm that might not have existed for others, but was inexpressively attractive to him, and was so much apart from the vulgar fascination of mere beauty, that it would have equally touched a chord at his heart, if coupled with homely features or a bloomless cheek. This charm was in a wonderful innocence and dovelike softness of expression. We all form to ourselves some *beau idéal* of the “fair spirit” we desire as our earthly “minister,” and somewhat capriciously gauge and proportion our admiration of living shapes according as the *beau idéal* is more or less embodied or approached. Beauty, of a stamp that is not familiar to the dreams of our fancy, may win the cold homage of our judgment, while a look, a feature, a something that realises and calls up a boyish vision, and assimilates even distantly to the picture we wear within us, has a loveliness peculiar to our eyes, and kindles an emotion that almost seems to belong to memory. It is this which the Platonists felt when they wildly supposed that souls attracted to each other on earth had been united in an earlier being and a diviner sphere ; and there was in the young face on which Ernest gazed precisely this ineffable harmony with his preconceived notions of the beautiful. Many a nightly and noontday reverie was realised in those mild yet smiling eyes of the darkest blue ; in that ingenuous breadth of brow, with its slightly pencilled arches, and the nose, not cut in that sharp and clear

symmetry which looks so lovely in marble, but usually gives to flesh and blood a decided and hard character, that better becomes the sterner than the gentler sex—no ; not moulded in the pure Grecian, nor in the pure Roman, cast ; but small, delicate, with the least possible inclination to turn upward, that was only to be detected in one position of the head, and served to give a prettier archness to the sweet flexible lips, which, from the gentleness of their repose, seemed to smile unconsciously, but rather from a happy constitutional serenity than from the giddiness of mirth. Such was the character of this fair child's countenance, on which Maltravers turned and gazed involuntarily and reverently, with something of the admiring delight with which we look upon the Virgin of a Raffaele, or the sunset landscape of a Claude. The girl did not appear to feel any premature coquetry at the evident, though respectful, admiration she excited. She met the eyes bent upon her, brilliant and eloquent as they were, with a fearless and unsuspecting gaze, and pointed out to her companion, with all a child's quick and unrestrained impulse, the shining and raven gloss, the arched and haughty neck, of Ernest's beautiful Arabian.

Now there happened between Maltravers and the young object of his admiration a little adventure, which served, perhaps, to fix in her recollection this short encounter with a stranger ; for certain it is, that, years after, she did remember both the circumstances of the adventure and the features of Maltravers. She

wore one of those large straw-hats which look so pretty upon children, and the warmth of the day made her untie the strings which confined it. A gentle breeze arose, as by a turn in the road the country became more open, and suddenly wafted the hat from its proper post—almost to the hoofs of Ernest's horse. The child naturally made a spring forward to arrest the deserter, and her foot slipped down the bank, which was rather steeply raised above the road; she uttered a low cry of pain. To dismount—to regain the prize—and to restore it to its owner, was, with Ernest, the work of a moment; the poor girl had twisted her ankle, and was leaning upon her servant for support. But when she saw the anxiety, and almost the alarm, upon the stranger's face (and her exclamation of pain had literally thrilled his heart—so much and so unaccountably had she excited his interest), she made an effort at self-control, not common at her years, and, with a forced smile, assured him she was not much hurt—that it was nothing—that she was just at home.

“Oh, miss!” said the servant, “I am sure you are very bad. Dear heart, how angry master will be! It was not my fault; was it, sir?”

“Oh no, it was not your fault, Margaret; don't be frightened—papa shan't blame you. But I'm much better now.” So saying, she tried to walk; but the effort was vain—she turned yet more pale, and though she struggled to prevent a shriek, the tears rolled down her cheeks.

It was very odd, but Maltravers had never felt more

touched—the tears stood in his own eyes ; he longed to carry her in his arms, but, child as she was, a strange kind of nervous timidity forbade him. Margaret, perhaps, expected it of him, for she looked hard in his face, before she attempted a burthen to which, being a small, slight person, she was by no means equal. However, after a pause, she took up her charge, who, ashamed of her tears, and almost overcome with pain, nestled her head in the woman's bosom, and Maltravers walked by her side, while his docile and well-trained horse followed at a distance, every now and then putting its fore-legs on the bank, and cropping away a mouthful of leaves from the hedgerow.

“ Oh, Margaret ! ” said the little sufferer, “ I cannot bear it—indeed I cannot.”

And Maltravers observed that Margaret had permitted the lame foot to hang down unsupported, so that the pain must indeed have been scarcely bearable. He could restrain himself no longer.

“ You are not strong enough to carry her,” said he, sharply, to the servant ; and the next moment the child was in his arms. Oh, with what anxious tenderness he bore her ! and he was so happy when she turned her face to him and smiled, and told him she now scarcely felt the pain. If it were possible to be in love with a child of eleven years old, Maltravers was almost in love. His pulses trembled as he felt her pure breath on his cheek, and her rich beautiful hair was waved by the breeze across his lips. He hushed his voice to a whisper as he poured forth all the soothing

and comforting expressions, which give a natural eloquence to persons fond of children—and Ernest Maltravers was the idol of children ;—he understood and sympathised with them ; he had a great deal of the child himself beneath the rough and cold husk of his proud reserve. At length they came to a lodge, and Margaret, eagerly inquiring “whether master and missus were at home,” seemed delighted to hear they were not. Ernest, however, insisted on bearing his charge across the lawn to the house, which, like most suburban villas, was but a stone’s throw from the lodge ; and, receiving the most positive promise that surgical advice should be immediately sent for, he was forced to content himself with laying the sufferer on a sofa in the drawing-room ; and she thanked him so prettily, and assured him she was so much easier, that he would have given the world to kiss her. The child had completed her conquest over him by being above the child’s ordinary littleness of making the worst of things, in order to obtain the consequence and dignity of being pitied—she was evidently unselfish, and considerate for others. He did kiss her, but it was the hand that he kissed, and no cavalier ever kissed his lady’s hand with more respect ; and then, for the first time, the child blushed—then, for the first time, she felt as if the day would come when she should be a child no longer ! Why was this ?—perhaps because it is an era in life—the first sign of a tenderness that inspires respect, not familiarity !

“If ever again I could be in love,” said Maltravers,

as he spurred on his road, "I really think it would be with that exquisite child. My feeling is more like that of love at first sight, than any emotion which beauty ever caused in me. Alice—Valerie—no; the *first* sight of them did not:—but what folly is this!—a child of eleven—and I verging upon thirty!"

Still, however, folly as it might be, the image of that young girl haunted Maltravers for many days; till change of scene, the distractions of society, the grave thoughts of manhood, and, above all, a series of exciting circumstances about to be narrated, gradually obliterated a strange and most delightful impression. He had learned, however, that Mr Templeton was the proprietor of the villa which was the child's home. He wrote to Ferrers, to narrate the incident, and to inquire after the sufferer. In due time he heard from that gentleman that the child was recovered, and gone with Mr and Mrs Templeton to Brighton, for change of air and sea-bathing.

BOOK VIII.

Ενθα — Παλλὰς ἔμολε καὶ
Δολιόφρων Κύπρις.—EURIP. *Iphig. in Aul.* l. 1310.

Whither come Wisdom's queen
And the snare-weaving Love.



BOOK VIII.

CHAPTER I.

Notitiam primosque gradus vicinia fecit.*—OVID.

CLEVELAND'S villa *was* full, and of persons usually called agreeable. Amongst the rest was Lady Florence Lascelles. The wise old man had ever counselled Maltravers not to marry too young ; but neither did he wish him to put off that momentous epoch of life till all the bloom of heart and emotion was passed away. He thought, with the old lawgivers, that thirty was the happy age for forming a connection, in the choice of which, with the reason of manhood, ought, perhaps, to be blended the passion of youth. And he saw that few men were more capable than Maltravers of the true enjoyments of domestic life. He had long thought, also, that none were more calculated to sympathise with Ernest's views, and appreciate his peculiar character, than the gifted and brilliant Florence Lascelles. Cleveland looked with toleration on her many

* Neighbourhood caused the acquaintance and first introduction.

eccentricities of thought and conduct — eccentricities which, he imagined, would rapidly melt away beneath the influence of that attachment which usually operates so great a change in women, and, where it is strongly and intensely felt, moulds even those of the most obstinate character into compliance or similitude with the sentiments or habits of its object.

The stately self-control of Maltravers was, he conceived, precisely that quality that gives to men an unconscious command over the very thoughts of the woman whose affection they win : while, on the other hand, he hoped that the fancy and enthusiasm of Florence would tend to render sharper and more practical an ambition, which seemed to the sober man of the world too apt to refine upon the means, and to *cui bono* the objects, of worldly distinction. Besides, Cleveland was one who thoroughly appreciated the advantages of wealth and station ; and the rank and the dower of Florence were such as would force Maltravers into a position in social life which could not fail to make new exactions upon talents which Cleveland fancied were precisely those adapted rather to command than to serve. In Ferrers he recognised a man to *get* into power—in Maltravers one by whom power, if ever attained, would be wielded with dignity, and exerted for great uses. Something, therefore, higher than mere covetousness for the vulgar interests of Maltravers, made Cleveland desire to secure to him the heart and hand of the great heiress ; and he fancied that, whatever might be the obstacle, it would not

be in the will of Lady Florence herself. He prudently resolved, however, to leave matters to their natural course. He hinted nothing to one party or the other. No place for falling in love like a large country-house, and no time for it, amongst the indolent well-born, like the close of a London season, when, jaded by small cares, and sickened of hollow intimacies, even the coldest may well yearn for the tones of affection—the excitement of an honest emotion.

Somehow or other it happened that Florence and Ernest, after the first day or two, were constantly thrown together. She rode on horseback, and Maltravers was by her side—they made excursions on the river, and they sat on the same bench in the gliding pleasure-boat. In the evenings, the younger guests, with the assistance of the neighbouring families, often got up a dance, in a temporary pavilion built out of the dining-room. Ernest never danced. Florence did at first. But once, as she was conversing with Maltravers, when a gay guardsman came to claim her promised hand in the waltz, she seemed struck by a grave change in Ernest's face.

“Do you never waltz?” she asked, while the guardsman was searching for a corner wherein safely to deposit his hat.

“No,” said he; “yet there is no impropriety in *my* waltzing.”

“And you mean that there is in mine?”

“Pardon me—I did not say so.”

“But you think it.”

“Nay, on consideration, I am glad, perhaps, that you do waltz.”

“You are mysterious.”

“Well then, I mean that you are precisely the woman I would never fall in love with. And I feel the danger is lessened when I see you destroy any one of my illusions, or I ought to say, attack any one of my prejudices.”

Lady Florence coloured ; but the guardsman and the music left her no time for reply. However, after that night she waltzed no more. She was unwell—she declared she was ordered not to dance, and so quadrilles were relinquished as well as the waltz.

Maltravers could not but be touched and flattered by this regard for his opinion ; but Florence contrived to testify it so as to forbid acknowledgment, since another motive had been found for it. The second evening after that commemorated by Ernest’s candid rudeness, they chanced to meet in the conservatory, which was connected with the ball-room ; and Ernest, pausing to inquire after her health, was struck by the listless and dejected sadness which spoke in her tone and countenance as she replied to him.

“Dear Lady Florence,” said he, “I fear you are worse than you will confess. You should shun these draughts. You owe it to your friends to be more careful of yourself.”

“Friends !” said Lady Florence, bitterly—“I have no friends !—even my poor father would not absent himself from a cabinet dinner a week after I was dead.

But that is the condition of public life—its hot and searing blaze puts out the lights of all lesser but not unholier affections.—Friends! Fate, that made Florence Lascelles the envied heiress, denied her brothers, sisters; and the hour of her birth lost her even the love of a mother! Friends! where shall I find them?"

As she ceased, she turned to the open casement, and stepped out into the verandah, and by the trembling of her voice Ernest felt that she had done so to hide or to suppress her tears.

"Yet," said he, following her, "there is one class of more distant friends, whose interest Lady Florence Lascelles cannot fail to secure, however she may disdain it. Among the humblest of that class suffer me to rank myself. Come, I assume the privilege of advice—the night air is a luxury you must not indulge."

"No, no, it refreshes me—it soothes. You misunderstand me; I have no illness that still skies and sleeping flowers can increase."

Maltravers, as is evident, was not in love with Florence, but he could not fail, brought, as he had lately been, under the direct influence of her rare and prodigal gifts, mental and personal, to feel for her a strong and even affectionate interest—the very frankness with which he was accustomed to speak to her, and the many links of communion there necessarily were between himself and a mind so naturally powerful and so richly cultivated, had already established their acquaintance upon an intimate footing.

"I cannot restrain you, Lady Florence," said he,

half smiling, "but my conscience will not let me be an accomplice. I will turn king's evidence, and hunt out Lord Saxingham to send him to you."

Lady Florence, whose face was averted from his, did not appear to hear him.

"And you, Mr Maltravers," turning quickly round—"you—have you friends? Do you feel that there are, I do not say public, but private affections and duties, for which life is made less a possession than a trust?"

"Lady Florence—no! I have friends, it is true, and Cleveland is of the nearest; but the life within life—the second self, in whom we vest the right and mastery over our own being—I know it not. But is it," he added, after a pause, "a rare privation? Perhaps it is a happy one. I have learned to lean on my own soul, and not look elsewhere for the reeds that a wind can break."

"Ah, it is a cold philosophy—you may reconcile yourself to its wisdom in the world, in the hum and shock of men: but in solitude, with Nature—ah, no! While the mind alone is occupied, you may be contented with the pride of stoicism; but there are moments when the *heart* awakens as from a sleep—awakens like a frightened child—to feel itself alone and in the dark."

Ernest was silent, and Florence continued, in an altered voice: "This is a strange conversation—and you must think me indeed a wild, romance-reading person, as the world is apt to call me. But if I live—I—pshaw! life denies ambition to women."

“If a woman like you, Lady Florence, should ever love, it will be one in whose career you may perhaps find that noblest of all ambitions—the ambition women only feel—the ambition for another!”

“Ah! but I shall never love,” said Lady Florence, and her cheek grew pale as the starlight shone on it; “still, perhaps,” she added quickly, “I may at least know the blessing of friendship. Why now,” and here, approaching Maltravers, she laid her hand with a winning frankness on his arm—“why now, should not we be to each other as if love, as you call it, were not a thing for earth—and friendship supplied its place!—there is no danger of our falling in love with each other. You are not vain enough to expect it in me, and I, you know, am a coquette: let us be friends, confidants—at least till you marry, or I give another the right to control my friendships and monopolise my secrets.”

Maltravers was startled—the sentiment Florence addressed to him, he, in words not dissimilar, had once addressed to Valerie.

“The world,” said he, kissing the hand that yet lay on his arm, “the world will——”

“Oh, you men!—the world, the world! Everything gentle—everything pure, everything noble, high-wrought, and holy—is to be squared, and cribbed, and maimed to the rule and measure of the world! The world—are you too its slave? Do you not despise its hollow cant—its methodical hypocrisy?”

“Heartily!” said Ernest Maltravers, almost with fierceness. “No man ever so scorned its false gods

and its miserable creeds—its war upon the weak—its fawning upon the great—its ingratitude to benefactors—its sordid league with mediocrity against excellence. Yes, in proportion as I love mankind, I despise and detest that worse than Venetian oligarchy which mankind set over them and call ‘THE WORLD.’”

And then it was, warmed by the excitement of released feelings, long and carefully shrouded, that this man, ordinarily so calm and self-possessed, poured burningly and passionately forth all those tumultuous and almost tremendous thoughts, which, however much we may regulate, control, or disguise them, lurk deep within the souls of all of us, the seeds of the eternal war between the natural man and the artificial; between our wilder genius and our social conventionalities;—thoughts that from time to time break forth into the harbingers of vain and fruitless revolutions, impotent struggles against destiny;—thoughts that good and wise men would be slow to promulgate and propagate, for they are of a fire which burns as well as brightens, and which spreads from heart to heart as a spark spreads amidst flax;—thoughts which are rifest where natures are most high, but belong to truths that virtue dare not tell aloud. And as Maltravers spoke, with his eyes flashing almost intolerable light, his breast heaving, his form dilated, never to the eyes of Florence Lascelles did he seem so great: the chains that bound the strong limbs of his spirit seemed snapped asunder, and all his soul was visible

and towering, as a thing that has escaped slavery, and lifts its crest to heaven, and feels that it is free.

That evening saw a new bond of alliance between these two persons ;—young, handsome, and of opposite sexes, they agreed to be friends, and nothing more !
Fools !

CHAPTER II

Idem velle, et idem nolle, ea demum firma amicitia est.*—SALLUST.

Carlos. That letter.

Princess Eboli. Oh, I shall die. Return it instantly.

SCHILLER, *Don Carlos.*

It seemed as if the compact Maltravers and Lady Florence had entered into, removed whatever embarrassment and reserve had previously existed. They now conversed with an ease and freedom, not common in persons of different sexes before they have passed their grand climacteric. Ernest, in ordinary life, like most men of warm emotions and strong imagination, if not taciturn, was at least guarded. It was as if a weight were taken from his breast, when he found one person who could understand him best when he was most candid. His eloquence—his poetry—his intense and concentrated enthusiasm, found a voice. He could talk to an individual as he would have written to the public—a rare happiness to the men of books.

Florence seemed to recover her health and spirits as by a miracle; yet was she more gentle, more subdued,

* To will the same thing and not to will the same thing, that at length is firm friendship.

than of old—there was less effort to shine, less indifference whether she shocked. Persons who had not met her before, wondered why she was dreaded in society. But at times a great natural irritability of temper—a quick suspicion of the motives of those around her—an imperious and obstinate vehemence of will, were visible to Maltravers, and served, perhaps, to keep him heart-whole. He regarded her through the eyes of the intellect, not those of the passions—he thought not of her as a woman : her very talents, her very grandeur of idea and power of purpose, while they delighted him in conversation, diverted his imagination from dwelling on her beauty. He looked on her as something apart from her sex—a glorious creature spoilt by being a woman. He once told her so, laughingly, and Florence considered it a compliment. Poor Florence ! her scorn of her sex avenged her sex, and robbed her of her proper destiny.

Cleveland silently observed their intimacy, and listened with a quiet smile to the gossips who pointed out *tête-à-têtes* by the terrace, and loiterings by the lawn, and predicted what would come of it all. Lord Saxingham was blind. But his daughter was of age, in possession of her princely fortune, and had long made him sensible of her independence of temper. His lordship, however, thoroughly misunderstood the character of her pride, and felt fully convinced she would marry no one less than a duke ; as for flirtations, he thought them natural and innocent amusements. Besides, he was very little at Temple Grove. He went to London

every morning, after breakfasting in his own room—came back to dine, play at whist, and talk good-humoured nonsense to Florence in his dressing-room, for the three minutes that took place between his sipping his wine-and-water and the appearance of his valet. As for the other guests, it was not their business to do more than gossip with each other; and so Florence and Maltravers went on their way unmolested, though not unobserved. Maltravers not being himself in love, never fancied that Lady Florence loved him, or that she would be in any danger of doing so;—this is a mistake a man often commits—a woman never. A woman always knows when she is loved, though she often imagines she is loved when she is not. Florence was not happy, for happiness is a calm feeling. But she was excited with a vague, wild, intoxicating emotion.

She had learned from Maltravers that she had been misinformed by Ferrers, and that no other claimed empire over his heart; and whether or not he loved her, still for the present they seemed all in all to each other; she lived but for the present day—she would not think of the morrow.

Since that severe illness which had tended so much to alter Ernest's mode of life, he had not come before the public as an author. Latterly, however, the old habit had broken out again. With the comparative idleness of recent years, the ideas and feelings which crowd so fast on the poetical temperament, once indulged, had accumulated within him to an excess that

demanded vent. For with some, to write is not a vague desire, but an imperious destiny. The fire is kindled, and must break forth ; the wings are fledged, and the birds must leave their nest. The communication of thought to man is implanted as an instinct in those breasts to which Heaven has intrusted the solemn agencies of genius. In the work which Maltravers now composed, he consulted Florence : his confidence delighted her — it was a compliment she could appreciate. Wild, fervid, impassioned, was that work—a brief and holiday creation—the youngest and most beloved of the children of his brain. And as day by day the bright design grew into shape, and thought and imagination found themselves “local habitations,” Florence felt as if she were admitted into the palace of the genii, and made acquainted with the mechanism of those spells and charms with which the preternatural powers of mind design the witchery of the world. Ah, how different in depth and majesty were those intercommunications of idea between Ernest Maltravers and a woman scarcely inferior to himself in capacity and acquirement, from that bridge of shadowy and dim sympathies which the enthusiastic boy had once built up between his own poetry of knowledge and Alice’s poetry of love !

It was one late afternoon in September, when the sun was slowly going down its western way, that Lady Florence, who had been all that morning in her own room, paying off, as she said, the dull arrears of correspondence, rather on Lord Saxingham’s account than

her own ; for he punctiliously exacted from her the most scrupulous attention to cousins fifty times removed, provided they were rich, clever, well off, or in any way of consequence :—it was one afternoon that, relieved from these avocations, Lady Florence strolled through the grounds with Cleveland. The gentlemen were still in the stubble-fields, the ladies were out in barouches and pony phaetons, and Cleveland and Lady Florence were alone.

Apropos of Florence's epistolary employment, their conversation fell upon that most charming species of literature, which joins with the interest of a novel the truth of a history—the French memoir and letter-writers. It was a part of literature in which Cleveland was thoroughly at home.

“Those agreeable and polished gossips,” said he, “how well they contrived to introduce nature into art ! Everything artificial seemed so natural to them. They even feel by a kind of clockwork, which seems to go better than the heart itself. Those pretty sentiments, those delicate gallantries, of Madame de Sévigné to her daughter, how amiable they are ! but somehow or other, I can never fancy them the least motherly. What an ending for a maternal epistle is that elegant compliment—‘*Songez que de tous les cœurs où vous regnez, il n’y en a aucun où votre empire soit si bien établi que dans le mien.*’ * I can scarcely fancy Lord Saxingham writing so to you, Lady Florence.”

* Think that of all the hearts over which you reign, there is not one in which your empire can be so well established as in mine.

“No, indeed,” replied Lady Florence, smiling. “Neither papas nor mammas in England are much addicted to compliment; but, I confess, I like preserving a sort of gallantry even in our most familiar connections—why should we not carry the imagination into all the affections?”

“I can scarce answer the why,” returned Cleveland; “but I think it would destroy the reality. I am rather of the old school. If I had a daughter, and asked her to get my slippers, I am afraid I should think it a little wearisome, if I had, in receiving them, to make *des belles phrases* in return.”

While they were thus talking, and Lady Florence continued to press her side of the question, they passed through a little grove that conducted to an arm of the stream which ornamented the grounds, and by its quiet and shadowy gloom was meant to give a contrast to the livelier features of the domain. Here they came suddenly upon Maltravers. He was walking by the side of the brook, and evidently absorbed in thought.

It was the trembling of Lady Florence’s hand as it lay on Cleveland’s arm, that induced him to stop short in an animated commentary on Rochefoucauld’s character of Cardinal de Retz, and look round.

“Ha, most meditative Jacques!” said he; “and what new moral hast thou been conning in our Forest of Ardennes?”

“Oh, I am glad to see you; I wished to consult you, Cleveland. But first, Lady Florence, to convince you and our host that my rambles have not been

wholly fruitless, and that I could not walk from Dan to Beersheba and find all barren, accept my offering—a wild rose that I discovered in the thickest part of the wood. It is not a civilised rose. Now, Cleveland, a word with you.”

“And now, Mr Maltravers, I am *de trop*,” said Lady Florence.

“Pardon me, I have no secrets from you in this matter—or rather, these matters; for there are two to be discussed. In the first place, Lady Florence, that poor Cesarini,—you know and like him—nay, no blushes.”

“Did I blush?—then it was in recollection of an old reproach of yours.”

“At its justice!—well, no matter. He is one for whom I always felt a lively interest. His very morbidity of temperament only increases my anxiety for his future fate. I have received a letter from De Montaigne, his brother-in-law, who seems seriously uneasy about Castruccio. He wishes him to leave England at once, as the sole means of restoring his broken fortunes. De Montaigne has the opportunity of procuring him a diplomatic situation, which may not again occur—and—but you know the man!—what shall we do? I am sure he will not listen to me; he looks on me as an interested rival for fame.”

“Do you think I have any subtler eloquence?” said Cleveland. “No, I am an author, too. Come, I think your ladyship must be the arch-negotiator.”

“He has genius, he has merit,” said Maltravers, pleadingly: “he wants nothing but time and experi-

ence to wean him from his foibles. *Will* you try to save him, Lady Florence ?”

“Why ! nay, I must not be obdurate ; I will see him when I go to town. It is like you, Mr Maltravers, to feel this interest in one——”

“Who does not like me, you would say ; but he will, some day or other. Besides, I owe him deep gratitude. In his weaker qualities I have seen many which all literary men might incur, without strict watch over themselves ; and let me add, also, that his family have great claims on me.”

“You believe in the soundness of his heart and in the integrity of his honour ?” said Cleveland, inquiringly.

“Indeed I do ; these are, these must be, the redeeming qualities of poets.”

Maltravers spoke warmly ; and such at that time was his influence over Florence, that his words formed—alas, too fatally !—her estimate of Castruccio’s character, which had at first been high, but which his own presumption had latterly shaken. She had seen him three or four times in the interval between the receipt of his apologetic letter and her visit to Cleveland, and he had seemed to her rather sullen than humbled. But she felt for the vanity she herself had wounded.

“And now,” continued Maltravers, “for my second subject of consultation. But that is political ; will it weary Lady Florence ?”

“Oh, no ; to politics I am never indifferent : they always inspire me with contempt or admiration, ac-

ording to the motives of those who bring the science into action. Pray say on."

"Well," said Cleveland, "one confidant at a time; you will forgive me, for I see my guests coming across the lawn, and I may as well make a diversion in your favour. Ernest can consult *me* at any time."

Cleveland walked away; but the intimacy between Maltravers and Florence was of so frank a nature, that there was nothing embarrassing in the thought of a *tête-à-tête*.

"Lady Florence," said Ernest, "there is no one in the world with whom I can confer so cheerfully as with you. I am almost glad of Cleveland's absence, for, with all his amiable and fine qualities, 'the world is too much with him,' and we do not argue from the same data. Pardon my prelude—now to my position. I have received a letter from Mr ——. That statesman, whom none but those acquainted with the chivalrous beauty of his nature can understand or appreciate, sees before him the most brilliant career that ever opened in this country to a public man not born an aristocrat. He has asked me to form one of the new administration that he is about to create: the place offered to me is above my merits, nor suited to what I have yet done, though, perhaps, it be suited to what I may yet do. I make that qualification, for you know," added Ernest, with a proud smile, "that I am sanguine and self-confident."

"You accept the proposal?"

"Nay—should I not reject it? Our politics are the

same only for the moment, our ultimate objects are widely different. To serve with Mr ——, I must make an unequal compromise—abandon nine opinions to promote one. Is not this a capitulation of that great citadel, one's own conscience? No man will call me inconsistent, for, in public life, to agree with another on a party question is all that is required; the thousand questions not yet ripened, and lying dark and concealed in the future, are not inquired into and divined; but I own I shall deem myself worse than inconsistent. For this is my dilemma—if I use this noble spirit merely to advance one object, and then desert him where he halts, I am treacherous to him; if I halt with him, but one of my objects effected, I am treacherous to myself. Such are my views. It is with pain I arrive at them, for at first my heart beat with a selfish ambition.”

“You are right, you are right!” exclaimed Florence, with glowing cheeks; “how could I doubt you? I comprehend the sacrifice you make; for a proud thing is it to soar above the predictions of foes in that palpable road to honour which the world's hard eyes can see, and the world's cold heart can measure; but prouder is it to feel that you have never advanced one step to the goal which remembrance would retract. No, my friend, wait your time, confident that it must come, when conscience and ambition can go hand-in-hand—when the broad objects of a luminous and enlarged policy lie before you like a chart, and you can calculate every step of the way without peril of being

lost. Ah, let them still call loftiness of purpose and whiteness of soul the dreams of a theorist;—even if they be so, the Ideal in this case is better than the Practical. Meanwhile your position is not one to forfeit lightly. Before you is that throne in literature which it requires no doubtful step to win, if you have, as I believe, the mental power to attain it. An ambition that may indeed be relinquished, if a more troubled career can better achieve those public purposes at which both letters and policy should aim, but which is not to be surrendered for the rewards of a placeman, or the advancement of a courtier.”

It was while uttering these noble and inspiring sentiments that Florence Lascelles suddenly acquired in Ernest's eye a loveliness with which they had not before invested her.

“Oh,” he said, as, with a sudden impulse, he lifted her hand to his lips, “blessed be the hour in which you gave me your friendship! These are the thoughts I have longed to hear from living lips, when I have been tempted to believe patriotism a delusion, and virtue but a name.”

Lady Florence heard, and her whole form seemed changed—she was no longer the majestic sibyl, but the attached, timorous, delighted woman.

It so happened that in her confusion she dropped from her hand the flower Maltravers had given her, and, involuntarily glad of a pretext to conceal her countenance, she stooped to take it from the ground. In so doing, a letter fell from her bosom—and Mal-

travers, as he bent forwards to forestall her own movement, saw that the direction was to himself, and in the handwriting of his unknown correspondent. He seized the letter, and gazed in flattered and entranced astonishment, first on the writing, next on the detected writer. Florence grew deadly pale, and, covering her face with her hands, burst into tears.

“Oh, fool that I was,” cried Ernest, in the passion of the moment, “not to know—not to have felt—that there were not two Florences in the world! But if the thought had crossed me, I would not have dared to harbour it.”

“Go, go,” sobbed Florence; “leave me—in mercy leave me!”

“Not till you bid me rise,” said Ernest, in emotion scarcely less deep than hers, as he sank on his knee at her feet.

Need I go on?—When they left that spot, a soft confession had been made—deep vows interchanged, and Ernest Maltravers was the accepted suitor of Florence Lascelles.

CHAPTER III.

A hundred fathers would in my situation tell you that, as you are of noble extraction, you should marry a nobleman. But I do not say so. I will not sacrifice my child to any prejudice.—KOTZEBUE, *Lovers' Vows*.

Take heed, my lord ; the welfare of us all
Hangs on the cutting short that fraudulent man.

SHAKESPEARE, *Henry VI*.

Oh, how this spring of love resembleth
Th' uncertain glory of an April day,
Which now shows all the beauty of the sun,
And by-and-by a cloud takes all away !

SHAKESPEARE, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*.

WHEN Maltravers was once more in his solitary apartment, he felt as in a dream. He had obeyed an impulse, irresistible, perhaps, but one with which the *conscience of his heart* was not satisfied. A voice whispered to him, "Thou hast deceived her and thyself—thou dost not love her !" In vain he recalled her beauty, her grace, her genius—her singular and enthusiastic passion for himself—the voice still replied, "Thou dost not love. Bid farewell for ever to thy fond dreams of a life more blessed than that of mortals. From the stormy sea of the future are blotted out eternally for thee Calypso and her Golden Isle. Thou canst no more paint on the dim canvass of thy desires the form of her with whom thou couldst dwell for

ever. Thou hast been unfaithful to thine own ideal—thou hast given thyself for ever and for ever to another—thou hast renounced hope—thou must live as in a prison, with a being with whom thou hast not the harmony of love.”

“No matter,” said Maltravers, almost alarmed, and starting from these thoughts, “I am betrothed to one who loves me—it is folly and dishonour to repent and to repine. I have gone through the best years of youth without finding the Egeria with whom the cavern would be sweeter than a throne. Why live to the grave a vain and visionary Nympholept? Out of the real world could I have made a nobler choice?”

While Maltravers thus communed with himself, Lady Florence passed into her father’s dressing-room, and there awaited his return from London. She knew his worldly views—she knew also the pride of her affianced, and she felt that she alone could mediate between the two.

Lord Saxingham at last returned; busy, bustling, important, and good-humoured as usual. “Well, Flory, well?—glad to see you—quite blooming, I declare,—never saw you with such a colour—monstrous like me, certainly. We always had fine complexions and fine eyes in our family. But I’m rather late—first bell rung—we *ci-devant jeunes hommes* are rather long dressing, and you are not dressed yet, I see.”

“My dearest father, I wished to speak with you on a matter of much importance.”

“Do you?—what! immediately?”

“Yes.”

“Well—what is it?—your Slingsby property, I suppose.”

“No, my dear father—pray sit down and hear me patiently.”

Lord Saxingham began to be both alarmed and curious—he seated himself in silence, and looked anxiously in the face of his daughter.

“You have always been very indulgent to me,” commenced Florence, with a half-smile, “and I have had my own way more than most young ladies. Believe me, my dear father, I am most grateful, not only for your affection, but your esteem. I have been a strange wild girl, but I am now about to reform; and as the first step, I ask your consent to give myself a preceptor and a guide——”

“A what!” cried Lord Saxingham.

“In other words, I am about to—to—well, the truth must out—to marry.”

“Has the Duke of—— been here to-day?”

“Not that I know of. But it is no duke to whom I have promised my hand—it is a nobler and rarer dignity that has caught my ambition. Mr Maltravers has——”

“Mr Maltravers!—Mr Devil!—the girl’s mad! don’t talk to me, child; I won’t consent to any such nonsense. A country gentleman—very respectable, very clever, and all that; but it’s no use talking—my mind’s made up. With your fortune, too!”

“My dear father, I will not marry without your con-

sent, though my fortune is settled on me, and I am of age."

"There's a good child ; and now let me dress—we shall be late."

"No, not yet," said Lady Florence, throwing her arm carelessly round her father's neck—"I shall marry Mr Maltravers, but it will be with your full approval. Just consider ; if I married the Duke of ——, he would expect all my fortune, such as it is. Ten thousand a-year is at my disposal : if I marry Mr Maltravers, it will be settled on you—I always meant it ; it is a poor return for your kindness, your indulgence, but it will show that your own Flory is not ungrateful."

"I won't hear."

"Stop—listen to reason. You are not rich ; you are entitled but to a small pension if you ever resign office ; and your official salary, I have often heard you say, does not prevent you from being embarrassed. To whom should a daughter give from her superfluities, but to a parent ?—from whom should a parent receive, but from a child, who can never repay his love ?—Ah, this is nothing ; but you—you who have never crossed her lightest whim—do not you destroy all the hopes of happiness your Florence can ever form."

Florence wept, and Lord Saxingham, who was greatly moved, let fall a few tears also. Perhaps it is too much to say that the pecuniary part of the proffered arrangement entirely won him over ; but still the way it was introduced softened his heart. He possibly thought

that it was better to have a good and grateful daughter in a country gentleman's wife, than a sullen and thankless one in a duchess. However that may be, certain it is, that before Lord Saxingham began his toilet, he promised to make no obstacle to the marriage, and all he asked in return was, that at least three months (but that, indeed, the lawyers would require) should elapse before it took place; and on this understanding Florence left him, radiant and joyous as Flora herself when the sun of spring makes the world a garden. Never had she thought so little of her beauty, and never had it seemed so glorious, as that happy evening. But Maltravers was pale and thoughtful, and Florence in vain sought his eyes during the dinner, which seemed to her insufferably long. Afterwards, however, they met, and conversed apart the rest of the evening: and the beauty of Florence began to produce upon Ernest's heart its natural effect; and that evening—ah, how Florence treasured the remembrance of every hour, every minute of its annals!

It would have been amusing to witness the short conversation between Lord Saxingham and Maltravers, when the latter sought the earl at night in his lordship's room. To Lord Saxingham's surprise, not a word did Maltravers utter of his own subordinate pretensions to Lady Florence's hand. Coldly, dryly, and almost haughtily, did he make the formal proposals, "as if," as Lord Saxingham afterwards said to Ferrers, "the man were doing me the highest possible honour in taking my daughter, the beauty of London, with fifty

thousand a-year, off my hands." But this was quite Maltravers!—if he had been proposing to the daughter of a country curate, without a sixpence, he would have been the humblest of the humble. The earl was embarrassed and discomposed—he was almost awed by the Siddons-like countenance and Coriolanus-like air of his future son-in-law—he even hinted nothing of the compromise as to time which he had made with his daughter. He thought it better to leave it to Lady Florence to arrange that matter. They shook hands frigidly, and parted. Maltravers went next into Cleveland's room, and communicated all to the delighted old man, whose congratulations were so fervid that Maltravers felt it would be a sin not to fancy himself the happiest man in the world. That night he wrote his refusal of the appointment offered him.

The next day Lord Saxingham went to his office in Downing Street as usual, and Lady Florence and Ernest found an opportunity to ramble through the grounds alone.

There it was that occurred those confessions, sweet alike to utter and to hear. Then did Florence speak of her early years—of her self-formed and solitary mind—of her youthful dreams and reveries. Nothing around her to excite interest or admiration, or the more romantic, the higher, or the softer qualities of her nature, she turned to contemplation and to books. It is the combination of the faculties with the affections, exiled from action, and finding no worldly vent, which produces Poetry, the child of passion and of thought. Hence,

before the real cares of existence claim them, the young who are abler yet lonelier than their fellows are nearly always poets : and Florence was a poetess. In minds like this, the first book that seems to embody and represent their own most cherished and beloved trains of sentiment and ideas, ever creates a reverential and deep enthusiasm. The lonely, and proud, and melancholy soul of Maltravers, which made itself visible in all his creations, became to Florence like a revealer of the secrets of her own nature. She conceived an intense and mysterious interest in the man whose mind exercised so pervading a power over her own. She made herself acquainted with his pursuits, his career ; she fancied she found a symmetry and harmony between the actual being and the breathing genius ; she imagined she understood what seemed dark and obscure to others. He whom she had never seen, grew to her a never-absent friend. His ambition, his reputation, were to her like a possession of her own. So at length, in the folly of her young romance, she wrote to him, and dreaming of no discovery, anticipating no result, the habit once indulged became to her that luxury which writing for the eye of the world is to an author oppressed with the burden of his own thoughts. At length she saw him, and he did not destroy her illusion. She might have recovered from the spell if she had found him ready at once to worship at her shrine. The mixture of reserve and frankness—frankness of language, reserve of manner—which belonged to Maltravers, piqued her. Her vanity became the auxiliary to her imagination.

At length they met at Cleveland's house ; their intercourse became more unrestrained—their friendship was established, and she discovered that she had wilfully implicated her happiness in indulging her dreams ; yet even then she believed that Maltravers loved her, despite his silence upon the subject of love. His manner, his words, bespoke his interest in her, and his voice was ever soft when he spoke to women ; for he had much of the old chivalric respect and tenderness for the sex. What was general, it was natural that she should apply individually—she who had walked the world but to fascinate and to conquer. It was probable that her great wealth and social position imposed a check on the delicate pride of Maltravers ; she hoped so—she believed it—yet she felt her danger, and her own pride at last took alarm. In such a moment she had resumed the character of the unknown correspondent—she had written to Maltravers—addressed her letter to his own house, and meant the next day to have gone to London, and posted it there. In this letter she had spoken of his visit to Cleveland, of his position with herself. She exhorted him, if he loved her, to confess, and, if not, to fly. She had written artfully and eloquently ; she was desirous of expediting her own fate ; and then, with that letter in her bosom, she had met Maltravers, and the reader has learned the rest. Something of all this the blushing and happy Florence now revealed ; and when she ended with uttering the woman's soft fear that she had been too bold, is it wonderful that Maltravers, clasping her to

his bosom, felt the gratitude, and the delighted vanity, which seemed even to himself like love? And into love those feelings rapidly and deliciously will merge, if fate and accident permit!

And now they were by the side of the water; and the sun was gently setting as on the eve before. It was about the same hour, the fairest of an autumn day; none were near—the slope of the hill hid the house from their view. Had they been in the desert, they could not have been more alone. It was not silence that breathed around them, as they sat on that bench with the broad beech spreading over them its trembling canopy of leaves;—but those murmurs of living nature which are sweeter than silence itself—the songs of birds—the tinkling bell of the sheep on the opposite bank—the wind sighing through the trees, and the gentle heaving of the glittering waves that washed the odorous reed and water-lily at their feet. They had both been for some moments silent; and Florence now broke the pause, but in tones more low than usual.

“Ah!” said she, turning towards him, “these hours are happier than we can find in that crowded world whither your destiny must call us. For me, ambition seems for ever at an end. I have found all; I am no longer haunted with the desire of gaining a vague something—a shadowy empire, that we call fame or power. The sole thought that disturbs the calm current of my soul, is the fear to lose a particle of the rich possession I have gained.”

“May your fears ever be as idle!”

“And you really love me! I repeat to myself ever and ever that one phrase. I could once have borne to lose you—now, it would be my death. I despaired of ever being loved for myself; my wealth was a fatal dower; I suspected avarice in every vow, and saw the base world lurk at the bottom of every heart that offered itself at my shrine. But you, Ernest—you, I feel, never could weigh gold in the balance; and you—if you love—love me for myself.”

“And I shall love thee more with every hour.”

“I know not that: I dread that you will love me less when you know me more. I fear I shall seem to you exacting—I am jealous already. I was jealous even of Lady T——, when I saw you by her side this morning. I would have your every look—monopolise your every word.”

This confession did not please Maltravers, as it might have done if he had been more deeply in love. Jealousy, in a woman of so vehement and imperious a nature, was indeed a passion to be dreaded.

“Do not say so, dear Florence,” said he, with a very grave smile; “for love should have implicit confidence as its bond and nature—and jealousy is doubt, and doubt is the death of love.”

A shade passed over Florence's *too* expressive face, and she sighed heavily.

It was at this time that Maltravers, raising his eyes, saw the form of Lumley Ferrers approaching towards them from the opposite end of the terrace: at the

same instant, a dark cloud crept over the sky, the waters seemed overcast, and the breeze fell: a chill and strange presentiment of evil shot across Ernest's heart, and, like many imaginative persons, he was unconsciously superstitious as to presentiments.

"We are no longer alone," said he, rising; "your cousin has doubtless learned our engagement, and comes to congratulate your suitor."

"Tell me," he continued musingly, as they walked on to meet Ferrers, "are you very partial to Lumley? what think you of his character?—it is one that perplexes me; sometimes I think that it has changed since we parted in Italy—sometimes I think that it has not changed, but ripened."

"Lumley I have known from a child," replied Florence, "and see much to admire and like in him; I admire his boldness and candour; his scorn of the world's littleness and falsehood; I like his good-nature—his gaiety—and fancy his heart better than it may seem to the superficial observer."

"Yet he appears to me selfish and unprincipled."

"It is from a fine contempt for the vices and follies of men that he has contracted the habit of consulting his own resolute will—and, believing everything done in this noisy stage of action a cheat, he has accommodated his ambition to the fashion. Though without what is termed genius, he will obtain a distinction and power that few men of genius arrive at."

"Because *genius* is essentially honest," said Maltravers. "However, you teach me to look on him more

indulgently. I suspect the real frankness of men whom I know to be hypocrites in public life—but perhaps I judge by too harsh a standard.”

“Third persons,” said Ferrers, as he now joined them, “are seldom unwelcome in the country ; and I flatter myself that I am the exact thing wanting to complete the charm of this beautiful landscape.”

“You are ever modest, my cousin.”

“It is my weak side, I know ; but I shall improve with years and wisdom. What say you, Maltravers ?” and Ferrers passed his arm affectionately through Ernest’s.

“By the by, I am too familiar—I am sunk in the world. I am a thing to be sneered at by you old-family people. I am next heir to a bran-new Brummagem peerage. Gad, I feel brassy already !”

“What ! is Mr Templeton—— ?”

“Mr Templeton no more ; he is defunct, extinguished—out of the ashes rises the phoenix Lord Vargrave. We had thought of a more sounding title ; De Courval has a nobler sound—but my good uncle has nothing of the Norman about him ; so we dropped the De as ridiculous ; Vargrave is euphonious and appropriate. My uncle has a manor of that name—Baron Vargrave of Vargrave.”

“Ah—I congratulate you.”

“Thank you. Lady Vargrave may destroy all my hopes yet. But nothing venture, nothing have. My uncle will be gazetted to-day. Poor man ! he will be delighted ; and as he certainly owes it much to me, he

will, I suppose, be very grateful—or hate me ever afterwards—that is a toss-up. A benefit conferred is a complete hazard between the thumb of pride and the forefinger of affection. Heads gratitude, tails hatred! There, that's a simile in the fashion of the old writers—'well of English undefiled!' humph!"

"So that beautiful child is Mrs Templeton's, or rather Lady Vargrave's, daughter by a former marriage?" said Maltravers, abstractedly.

"Yes, it is astonishing how fond he is of her. Pretty little creature—confoundedly artful, though. By the way, Maltravers, we had an unexpectedly stormy night the last of the session—strong division—ministers hard pressed. I made quite a good speech for them. I suppose, however, there will be some change—the moderates will be taken in. Perhaps by next session I may congratulate you."

Ferrers looked hard at Maltravers while he spoke. But Ernest replied coldly, and evasively; and they were now joined by a party of idlers, lounging along the lawn in expectation of the first dinner-bell. Cleveland was in high consultation about the proper spot for a new fountain; and he summoned Maltravers to give his opinion whether it should spring from the centre of a flower-bed or beneath the drooping shade of a large willow. While this interesting discussion was going on, Ferrers drew aside his cousin, and, pressing her hand affectionately, said, in a soft and tender voice—

"My dear Florence—for in such a time permit me

to be familiar—I understand from Lord Saxingham, whom I met in London, that you are engaged to Maltravers. Busy as I was, I could not rest without coming hither to offer my best and most earnest wish for your happiness. I may seem a careless, I am considered a selfish person; but my heart is warm to those who really interest it. And never did brother offer up for the welfare of a beloved sister prayers more anxious and fond, than those that poor Lumley Ferrers breathes for Florence Lascelles.”

Florence was startled and melted—the whole tone and manner of Lumley was so different from those he usually assumed. She warmly returned the pressure of his hand, and thanked him briefly, but with emotion.

“No one is great and good enough for you, Florence,” continued Ferrers—“no one. But I admire your disinterested and generous choice. Maltravers and I have not been friends lately; but I respect him, as all must. He has noble qualities, and he has great ambition. In addition to the deep and ardent love that you cannot fail to inspire, he will owe you eternal gratitude. In this aristocratic country, your hand secures to him the most brilliant fortunes, the most proud career. His talents will now be measured by a very different standard. His merits will not pass through any subordinate grades, but leap at once into the highest posts; and as he is even more proud than ambitious, how he must bless one who raises him, without effort, into positions of eminent command!”

“Oh, he does not think of such worldly advantages—he, the too pure, the too refined!” said Florence, with trembling eagerness. “He has no avarice—nothing mercenary in his nature!”

“No; there you indeed do him justice: there is not a particle of baseness in his mind—I did not say there was. The very greatness of his aspirations, his indignant and scornful pride, lift him above the thought of your wealth, your rank—except as means to an end.”

“You mistake still,” said Florence, faintly smiling, but turning pale.

“No,” resumed Ferrers, not appearing to hear her, and as if pursuing his own thoughts. “I always predicted that Maltravers would make a distinguished connection in marriage. He would not permit himself to love the low-born or the poor. His affections are in his pride as much as in his heart. He is a great creature—you have judged wisely—and may Heaven bless you!”

With these words Ferrers left her, and Florence, when she descended to dinner, wore a moody and clouded brow. Ferrers stayed three days at the house. He was peculiarly cordial to Maltravers, and spoke little to Florence. But that little never failed to leave upon her mind a jealous and anxious irritability, to which she yielded with morbid facility. In order perfectly to understand Florence Lascelles, it must be remembered that, with all her dazzling qualities, she was not what is called a lovable person. A certain hardness in her disposition, even as a child; had prevented her

winding into the hearts of those around her. Deprived of her mother's care—having little or no intercourse with children of her own age—brought up with a starched governess, or female relations poor and proud—she never had contracted the softness of manner which the reciprocation of household affections usually produces. With a haughty consciousness of her powers, her birth, her position, advantages always dinned into her ear, she grew up solitary, unsocial, and imperious. Her father was rather proud than fond of her; her servants did not love her—she had too little consideration for others, too little blandness and suavity, to be loved by inferiors; she was too learned and too stern to find pleasure in the conversation and society of young ladies of her own age:—she had no friends. Now, having really strong affections, she felt all this, but rather with resentment than grief; she longed to be loved, but did not *seek* to be so; she felt as if it was her fate not to be loved; she blamed Fate, not herself.

When, with all the proud, pure, and generous candour of her nature, she avowed to Ernest her love for him, she naturally expected the most ardent and passionate return; nothing less could content her. But the habit and experience of all the past made her eternally suspicious that she was not loved; it was wormwood and poison to her to fancy that Maltravers had ever considered her advantages of fortune, except as a bar to his pretensions and a check on his passion. It was the same thing to her, whether it was the pettiest

avarice or the loftiest aspirations that actuated her lover, if he *had been* actuated in his heart by any sentiment *but* love ; and Ferrers, to whose eye her foibles were familiar, knew well how to make his praises of Ernest arouse against Ernest all her exacting jealousies and irritable doubts.

“ It is strange,” said he, one evening, as he was conversing with Florence, “ how complete and triumphant a conquest you have effected over Ernest ! Will you believe it ?—he conceived a prejudice against you when he first saw you—he even said that you were made to be admired, not to be loved.”

“ Ha ! did he so ?—true, true—he has almost said the same thing to me.”

“ But now how he must love you ! Surely he has all the signs.”

“ And what are the signs, most learned Lumley ? ” said Florence, forcing a smile.

“ Why, in the first place, you will doubtless observe that he never takes his eyes from you : with whomsoever he converses, whatever his occupation, those eyes, restless and pining, wander around for one glance from you.”

Florence sighed, and looked up : at the other end of the room, her lover was conversing with Cleveland, and his eyes never wandered in search of her.

Ferrers did not seem to notice this practical contradiction of his theory, but went on.

“ Then surely his whole character is changed—that brow has lost its calm majesty, that deep voice its as-

sured and tranquil tone. Has he not become humble, and embarrassed, and fretful, living only on your smile, reproachful if you look upon another—sorrowful if your lip be less smiling—a thing of doubt, and dread, and trembling agitation—slave to a shadow—no longer lord of the creation? Such is love—such is the love you should inspire—such is the love Maltravers is capable of, for I have seen him testify it to another. But,” added Lumley, quickly, and as if afraid he had said too much, “Lord Saxingham is looking out for me to make up his whist-table. I go to-morrow—when shall you be in town?”

“In the course of the week,” said poor Florence, mechanically; and Lumley walked away.

In another moment, Maltravers, who had been more observant than he seemed, joined her where she sat.

“Dear Florence,” said he, tenderly, “you look pale—I fear you are not so well this evening.”

“No affectation of an interest you do not feel, pray,” said Florence, with a scornful lip but swimming eyes.

“Do not feel, Florence!”

“It is the first time, at least, that you have observed whether I am well or ill. But it is no matter.”

“My dear Florence—why this tone?—how have I offended you? Has Lumley said——”

“Nothing but in your praise. Oh, be not afraid, you are one of those of whom all speak highly. But do not let me detain you here! let us join our host—you have left him alone.”

Lady Florence waited for no reply, nor did Maltravers attempt to detain her. He looked pained, and when she turned round to catch a glance that she hoped would be reproachful, he was gone. Lady Florence became nervous and uneasy, talked she knew not what, and laughed hysterically. She, however, deceived Cleveland into the notion that she was in the best possible spirits.

By-and-by she rose, and passed through the suite of rooms: her heart was with Maltravers—still he was not visible. At length she entered the conservatory, and there she observed him, through the open casements, walking slowly, with folded arms, upon the moonlit lawn. There was a short struggle in her breast between woman's pride and woman's love; the last conquered, and she joined him.

“Forgive me, Ernest,” she said, extending her hand; “I was to blame.”

Ernest kissed the fair hand, and answered touchingly—

“Florence, you have the power to wound me; be forbearing in its exercise. Heaven knows that I would not, from the vain desire of showing command over you, inflict upon you a single pang. Ah! do not fancy that in lovers' quarrels there is any sweetness that compensates the sting.”

“I told you I was too exacting, Ernest. I told you you would not love me so well when you knew me better.”

“And were a false prophetess. Florence, every day,

every hour I love you more—better than I once thought I could.”

“Then,” cried this wayward girl, anxious to pain herself—“then once you did not love me?”

“Florence, I will be candid—I did not. You are now rapidly obtaining an empire over me, greater than my reason should allow. But, beware: if my love be really a possession you desire—beware how you arm my reason against you. Florence, I am a proud man. My very consciousness of the more splendid alliances you could form renders me less humble a lover than you might find in others. I were not worthy of you if I were not tenacious of my self-respect.”

“Ah!” said Florence, to whose heart these words went home, “forgive me but this once. I shall not forgive myself so soon.”

And Ernest drew her to his heart, and felt that, with all her faults, a woman whom he feared he could not render as happy as her sacrifices to him deserved, was becoming very dear to him. In his heart he knew that she was not formed to render *him* happy; but that was not his thought, his fear. Her love had rooted out all thought of self from that generous breast. His only anxiety was to requite *her*.

They walked along the sward, silent, thoughtful; and Florence melancholy, yet blessed.

“That serene heaven, those lovely stars,” said Maltravers at last, “do they not preach to us the Philosophy of Peace? Do they not tell us how much of

calm belongs to the dignity of man and the sublime essence of the soul? Petty distractions and self-wrought cares are not congenial to our real nature; their very disturbance is a proof that they are at war with our natures. Ah, sweet Florence, let us learn from yon skies, over which, in the faith of the Poets of old, brooded the wings of primeval and serenest Love, what earthly love should be—a thing pure as light, and peaceful as immortality, watching over the stormy world, that it shall survive, and high above the clouds and vapours that roll below. Let little minds introduce into the holiest of affections all the bitterness and tumult of common life! Let *us* love as beings who will one day be inhabitants of the stars!”

CHAPTER IV.

A slippery and subtle knave; a finder-out of occasions; that has an eye can stamp and counterfeit advantages.—*Othello*.

Knavery's plain face is never seen till used.—*Ibid*.

“You see, my dear Lumley,” said Lord Saxingham, as the next day the two kinsmen were on their way to London in the earl's chariot—“you see that, at the best, this marriage of Flory's is a cursed bore.”

“Why, indeed, it has its disadvantages. Maltravers is a gentleman and a man of genius; but gentlemen are plentiful, and his genius only tells against us, since he is not even of our politics.”

“Exactly—my own son-in-law voting against me!”

“A practicable reasonable man would change: not so Maltravers—and all the estates, and all the parliamentary influence, and all the wealth that ought to go with the family and with the party, go out of the family and against the party. You are quite right, my dear lord—it is a cursed bore.”

“And she might have had the Duke of ——, a man with a rental of £100,000 a-year. It is too ridiculous. This Maltravers—d——d disagreeable fellow, too, eh?”

“Stiff and stately—much changed for the worse of late years—grown conceited and set up.”

“Do you know, Lumley, I would rather, of the two, have had you for my son-in-law?”

Lumley half started. “Are you serious, my lord? I have not Ernest’s fortune—I cannot make such settlements: my lineage too, at least on my mother’s side, is less ancient.”

“Oh, as to settlements, Flory’s fortune ought to be settled on herself,—and as compared with that fortune, what could Mr Maltravers pretend to settle? Neither she nor any children she may have could want his £4000 a-year, if he settled it all. As for family, connections tell more nowadays than Norman descent; and for the rest, you are likely to be old Templeton’s heir, to have a peerage (a large sum of ready money is always useful)—are rising in the House—one of our own set—will soon be in office—and, flattery apart, a devilish good fellow into the bargain. Oh, I would sooner a thousand times that Flory had taken a fancy to you!”

Lumley Ferrers bowed his head, but said nothing. He fell into a reverie, and Lord Saxingham took up his official red box, became deep in its contents, and forgot all about the marriage of his daughter.

Lumley pulled the check-string as the carriage entered Pall Mall, and desired to be set down at the “Travellers.” While Lord Saxingham was borne on to settle the affairs of the nation, not being able to settle those of his own household, Ferrers was inquir-

ing the address of Castruccio Cesarini. The porter was unable to give it him. The Signor generally called every day for his notes, but no one at the club knew where he lodged. Ferrers wrote, and left with the porter, a line requesting Cesarini to call on him as soon as possible, and bent his way to his house in Great George Street. He went straight into his library, unlocked his escritoire, and took out that letter which, the reader will remember, Maltravers had written to Cesarini, and which Lumley had secured: carefully did he twice read over this effusion, and the second time his face brightened and his eyes sparkled. It is now time to lay this letter before the reader; it ran thus:—

“ Private and confidential.

“ MY DEAR CESARINI,—The assurance of your friendly feelings is most welcome to me. In much of what you say of marriage, I am inclined, though with reluctance, to agree. As to Lady Florence herself, few persons are more calculated to dazzle, perhaps to fascinate. But is she a person to make a home happy—to sympathise where she has been accustomed to command—to comprehend, and to yield to the waywardness and irritability common to our fanciful and morbid race—to content herself with the homage of a single heart? I do not know her enough to decide the question; but I know her enough to feel deep solicitude and anxiety for your happiness, if centred in a nature so imperious and so vain. But you will remind me of her fortune,

her station. You will say that such are the sources from which, to an ambitious mind, happiness may well be drawn! Alas! I fear that the man who marries Lady Florence must indeed confine his dreams of felicity to those harsh and disappointing realities. But, Cesarini, these are not the words which, were we more intimate, I would address to you. I doubt the reality of those affections which you ascribe to her, and suppose devoted to yourself. She is evidently fond of conquest. She sports with the victims she makes. Her vanity dupes others,—perhaps to be duped itself at last. I will not say more to you.—Yours,

“E. MALTRAVERS.”

“Hurrah!” cried Ferrers, as he threw down the letter, and rubbed his hands with delight. “I little thought, when I schemed for this letter, that chance would make it so inestimably serviceable. There is less to alter than I thought for—the clumsiest botcher in the world could manage it. Let me look again.—Hem, hem—the first phrase to alter is this:—‘I know her enough to feel deep solicitude and anxiety for *your* happiness, if centred in a nature so imperious and vain’—scratch out ‘your,’ and put ‘my.’ All the rest good, good—till we come to ‘affections which you ascribe to her, and suppose devoted to *yourself* :’ for ‘*yourself*’ write ‘*myself*’—the rest will do. Now, then, the date—we must change it to the present month, and the work is done. I wish that Italian blockhead would come. If I can but once make an

irreparable breach between her and Maltravers, I think I cannot fail of securing his place ; her pique, her resentment, will hurry her into taking the first who offers, by way of revenge. And, by Jupiter, even if I fail (which I am sure I shall not), it will be something to keep Flory as lady paramount for a duke of our own party. I shall gain immensely by such a connection ; but I lose everything and gain nothing by her marrying Maltravers—of opposite politics too—whom I begin to hate like poison. But no duke shall have her—Florence Ferrers, the only alliteration I ever liked—yet it would sound rough in poetry.”

Lumley then deliberately drew towards him his inkstand—“No penknife !—Ah, true, I never mend pens—sad waste—must send out for one.” He rang the bell, ordered a penknife to be purchased, and the servant was still out when a knock at the door was heard, and in a minute more Cesarini entered.

“Ah,” said Lumley, assuming a melancholy air, “I am glad that you are arrived ; you will excuse my having written to you so unceremoniously. You received my note—sit down, pray. And how are you ?—you look delicate—can I offer you anything ?”

“Wine,” said Cesarini, laconically, “wine ; your climate requires wine.”

Here the servant entered with the penknife, and was ordered to bring wine and sandwiches. Lumley then conversed lightly on different matters till the wine appeared ; he was rather surprised to observe Cesarini pour out and drink off glass upon glass, with an evident

craving for the excitement. When he had satisfied himself, he turned his dark eyes to Ferrers, and said, "You have news to communicate; I see it in your brow. I am now ready to hear all."

"Well, then, listen to me: you were right in your suspicions; jealousy is ever a true diviner. I make no doubt Othello was quite right, and Desdemona was no better than she should be. Maltravers has proposed to my cousin and been accepted."

Cesarini's complexion grew perfectly ghastly; his whole frame shook like a leaf—for a moment he seemed paralysed.

"Curse him!" said he, at last, drawing a deep breath, and betwixt his grinded teeth—"curse him, from the depths of the heart he has broken!"

"And after such a letter to you!—do you remember it?—here it is. He warns you against Lady Florence, and then secures her to himself—is this treachery?"

"Treachery, black as hell! I am an Italian," cried Cesarini, springing to his feet, and with all the passions of his climate in his face, "and I will be avenged! Bankrupt in fortune, ruined in hopes, blasted in heart, I have still the godlike consolation of the desperate—I have revenge."

"Will you call him out?" asked Lumley, musingly and calmly. "Are you a dead shot? If so, it is worth thinking about; if not, it is a mockery—your shot misses, his goes in the air, seconds interpose, and you both walk away devilish glad to get off so well. Duels are humbug."

“Mr Ferrers,” said Cesarini, fiercely, “this is not a matter of jest.”

“I do not make it a jest ; and what is more, Cesarini,” said Ferrers, with a concentrated energy far more commanding than the Italian’s fury—“what is more, I so detest Maltravers, I am so stung by his cold superiority, so wroth with his success, so loathe the thought of his alliance, that I would cut off this hand to frustrate that marriage ! I do not jest, man ; but I have method and sense in my hatred—it is our English way.”

Cesarini stared at the speaker gloomily, clenched his hand, muttered and strode rapidly to and fro the room.

“You would be avenged, so would I. Now what shall be the means ?” said Ferrers.

“I will stab him to the heart—I will——”

“Cease these tragic flights. Nay, frown and stamp not ; but sit down, and be reasonable, or leave me, and act for yourself.”

“Sir,” said Cesarini, with an eye that might have alarmed a man less resolute than Ferrers, “have a care how you presume on my distress.”

“You are in distress, and you refuse relief ; you are bankrupt in fortune, and you rave like a poet, when you should be devising and plotting for the attainment of boundless wealth. Revenge and ambition may both be yours ; but they are prizes never won but by a cautious foot as well as a bold hand.”

“What would you have me do ? and what but his life would content me ?”

“Take his life if you can—I have no objection—go

and take it; only just observe this, that if you miss your aim, or he, being the stronger man, strike you down, you will be locked up in a madhouse for the next year or two, at least; and that is not the place in which I should like to pass the winter—but as you will.”

“You!—you!—But what are you to me? I will go. Good-day, sir.”

“Stay a moment,” said Ferrers, when he saw Cesarini about to leave the room; “stay, take this chair, and listen to me—you had better——”

Cesarini hesitated, and then, as it were, mechanically obeyed.

“Read that letter which Maltravers wrote to you. You have finished—well—now observe—if Florence sees that letter, she will not and cannot marry the man who wrote it—you must show it to her.”

“Ah, my guardian angel, I see it all! Yes, there are words in this letter no woman so proud could ever pardon. Give it me again, I will go at once.”

“Pshaw! You are too quick; you have not remarked that this letter was written five months ago, before Maltravers knew much of Lady Florence. He himself has confessed to her that he did not then love her—so much the more would she value the conquest she has now achieved. Florence would smile at this letter, and say, ‘Ah, he judges me differently now.’”

“Are you seeking to madden me? What do you mean? Did you not just now say that, did she see that letter, she would never marry the writer?”

“Yes, yes, but the letter must be altered. We must erase the date; we must date it from to-day;—to-day—Maltravers returns to-day. We must suppose it written not in answer to a letter from you, demanding his advice and opinion as to *your* marriage with Lady Florence, but in answer to a letter of yours in which you congratulate *him* on his approaching marriage to her. By the substitution of one pronoun for another in two places, the letter will read as well one way as another. Read it again, and see; or stop, I will be the lecturer.”

Here Ferrers read over the letter, which, by the trifling substitutions he proposed, might indeed bear the character he wished to give it.

“Does the light break in upon you now?” said Ferrers. “Are you prepared to go through a part that requires subtlety, delicacy, address, and, above all, self-control?—qualities that are the common attributes of your countrymen.”

“I will do all, fear me not. It may be villanous, it may be base; but I care not. Maltravers shall not rival, master, eclipse me in all things.”

“Where are you lodging?”

“Where?—out of town a little way.”

“Take up your home with me for a few days. I cannot trust you out of my sight. Send for your luggage; I have a room at your service.”

Cesarini at first refused; but a man who resolves on a crime, feels the awe of solitude and the necessity of a companion. He went himself to bring his effects, and promised to return to dinner.

“I must own,” said Lumley, resettling himself at his desk, “this is the dirtiest trick that ever I played; but the glorious end sanctifies the paltry means. After all, it is the mere prejudice of gentlemanlike education.”

A very few seconds, and with the aid of the knife to erase, and the pen to rewrite, Ferrers completed his task, with the exception of the change of date, which, on second thoughts, he reserved as a matter to be regulated by circumstances.

“I think I have hit off his *m*'s and *y*'s tolerably,” said he, “considering I was not brought up to this sort of thing. But the alteration would be visible on close inspection. Cesarini must read the letter to her, then if she glances over it herself it will be with bewildered eyes and a dizzy brain. Above all, he must not leave it with her, and must bind her to the closest secrecy. She is honourable, and will keep her word; and so now that matter is settled. I have just time before dinner to canter down to my uncle's and wish the old fellow joy.”

CHAPTER V.

And then my lord has much that he would state
All good to you.—CRABBE, *Tales of the Heart*.

LORD VARGRAVE was sitting alone in his library, with his account-books before him. Carefully did he cast up the various sums, which, invested in various speculations, swelled his income. The result seemed satisfactory—and the rich man threw down his pen with an air of triumph. “I will invest £120,000 in land—only £120,000 ; I will not be tempted to sink more. I will have a fine house—a house fitting for a nobleman—a fine old Elizabethan house—a house of historical interest. I must have woods and lakes—and a deer-park, above all. Deer are very gentlemanlike things, very. De Clifford’s place is to be sold, I know ; they ask too much for it, but ready money is tempting. I can bargain—bargain ; I am a good hand at a bargain. Should I be now Lord Baron Vargrave, if I had always given people what they asked ? I will double my subscriptions to the Bible Society, and the Philanthropic, and the building of new churches. The world shall not say Richard Templeton does not deserve

his greatness. I will——Come in. Who's there?—come in.”

The door gently opened—the meek face of the new peeress appeared. “I disturb you—I beg your pardon—I——”

“Come in, my dear, come in—I want to talk to you—I want to talk to your ladyship—sit down, pray.”

Lady Vargrave obeyed.

“You see,” said the peer, crossing his legs, and caressing his left foot with both hands, while he seesawed his stately person to and fro in his chair—“you see that the honour conferred upon me will make a great change in our mode of life, Mrs Temple——, I mean Lady Vargrave. This villa is all very well—my country-house is not amiss for a country gentleman—but now we must support our rank. The landed estate I already possess will go with the title—go to Lumley; I shall buy another at my own disposal, one that I can feel *thoroughly mine*; it shall be a splendid place, Lady Vargrave.”

“This place is splendid to me,” said Lady Vargrave, timidly.

“This place! nonsense—you must learn loftier ideas, Lady Vargrave; you are young, you can easily contract new habits—more easily, perhaps, than myself: you are naturally ladylike, though I say it—you have good taste, you don't talk much, you don't show your ignorance—quite right. You must be presented at court, Lady Vargrave—we must give great dinners, Lady Vargrave. Balls are sinful, so is the opera—at least I

fear so ; yet an opera-box would be a proper appendage to your rank, Lady Vargrave."

"My dear Mr Templeton——"

"Lord Vargrave, if your ladyship pleases."

"I beg pardon. May you live long to enjoy your honours ; but I, my dear lord—I am not fit to share them : it is only in our quiet life that I can forget what—what I was. You terrify me when you talk of court—of——"

"Stuff, Lady Vargrave ! stuff ; we accustom ourselves to these things. Do I look like a man who has stood behind a counter ?—rank is a glove that stretches to the hand that wears it. And the child, dear child—dear Evelyn, she shall be the admiration of London, the beauty, the heiress, the—oh, she will do me honour !"

"She will, she will !" said Lady Vargrave, and the tears gushed from her eyes.

Lord Vargrave was softened.

"No mother ever deserved more from a child than you from Evelyn."

"I would hope I have done my duty," said Lady Vargrave, drying her tears.

"Papa, papa !" cried an impatient voice, tapping at the window, "come and play, papa—come and play at ball, papa !"

And there, by the window, stood that beautiful child, glowing with health and mirth—her light hair tossed from her forehead, her sweet mouth dimpled with smiles.

"My darling, go on the lawn—don't over-exert your-

self ; you have not quite recovered that horrid sprain. I will join you immediately—bless you !”

“Don’t be long, papa—nobody plays so nicely as you do ;” and, nodding and laughing from very glee, away scampered the young fairy.

Lord Vargrave turned to his wife.

“What think you of my nephew—of Lumley ?” said he, abruptly.

“He seems all that is amiable, frank, and kind.”

Lord Vargrave’s brow became thoughtful. “I think so too,” he said, after a short pause ; “and I hope you will approve of what I mean to do. You see Lumley was brought up to regard himself as my heir—I owe something to him, beyond the poor estate which goes with, but never can adequately support, *my* title. Family honours, hereditary rank, must be properly regarded. But that dear girl—I shall leave her the bulk of my fortune. Could we not unite the fortune and the title ? It would secure the rank to her, it would incorporate all my desires—all my duties.”

“But,” said Lady Vargrave, with evident surprise, “if I understand you rightly, the disparity of years——”

“And what then, what then, Lady Vargrave ? Is there no disparity of years between *us*—a greater disparity than between Lumley and that tall girl ? Lumley is a mere youth, a youth still, five-and-thirty—he will be little more than forty when they marry ; I was between fifty and sixty when I married you, Lady Vargrave. I don’t like boy-and-girl marriages : a man should be older than his wife. But you are so romantic,

Lady Vargrave. Besides, Lumley is so gay and good-looking, and wears so well. He has been very nearly forming another attachment; but that, I trust, is out of his head now. They must like each other. You will not gainsay me, Lady Vargrave, and if anything happens to me—life is uncertain.”

“Oh, do not speak so—my friend, my benefactor!”

“Why, indeed,” resumed his lordship, mildly, “thank Heaven, I am very well—feel younger than ever I did—but still life is uncertain; and if you survive me, you will not throw obstacles in the way of my grand scheme?”

“I—no, no—of course you have the right in all things over her destiny; but so young—so soft-hearted, if she should love one of her own years——”

“Love!—pooh! love does not come into girls’ heads unless it is put there. We will bring her up to love Lumley. I have another reason—a cogent one—our secret!—to him it can be confided—it should not go out of our family. Even in my grave I could not rest if a slur were cast on my respectability—my name.”

Lord Vargrave spoke solemnly and warmly; then muttering to himself, “Yes, it is for the best,” he took up his hat and quitted the room. He joined his step-child on the lawn. He romped with her—he played with her—that stiff, stately man!—he laughed louder than she did, and ran almost as fast. And when she

was fatigued and breathless, he made her sit down beside him, in a little summerhouse, and, fondly stroking down her disordered tresses, said, "You tire me out, child; I am growing too old to play with you. Lumley must supply my place. You love Lumley?"

"Oh, dearly, he is so good-humoured, so kind; he has given me such a beautiful doll, with *such* eyes!"

"You shall be his little wife—you would like to be his little wife?"

"Wife! why, poor mamma is a wife, and she is not so happy as I am."

"Your mamma has bad health, my dear," said Lord Vargrave, a little discomposed. "But it is a fine thing to be a wife and have a carriage of your own, and a fine house, and jewels, and plenty of money, and be your own mistress; and Lumley will love you dearly."

"Oh, yes, I should like all that."

"And you will have a protector, child, when I am no more!"

The tone, rather than the words, of her stepfather struck a damp into that childish heart. Evelyn lifted her eyes, gazed at him earnestly, and then throwing her arms round him, burst into tears.

Lord Vargrave wiped his own eyes and covered her with kisses.

"Yes, you shall be Lumley's wife, his honoured wife, heiress to my rank as to my fortunes."

"I will do all that papa wishes."

“You will be Lady Vargrave then, and Lumley will be your husband,” said the stepfather, impressively. “Think over what I have said. Now let us join mamma. But, as I live, here is Lumley himself. However, it is not yet the time to sound him :—I hope that he has no chance with that Lady Florence.”

CHAPTER VI.

Fair encounter
Of two most rare affections.—*Tempest.*

MEANWHILE the betrothed were on their road to London. The balmy and serene beauty of the day had induced them to perform the short journey on horseback. It is somewhere said, that lovers are never so handsome as in each other's company, and neither Florence nor Ernest ever looked so well as on horseback. There was something in the stateliness and the grace of both, something even in the aquiline outline of their features, and the haughty bend of the neck, that made a sort of likeness between these young persons, although there was no comparison as to their relative degrees of personal advantage: the beauty of Florence defied all comparison. And as they rode from Cleveland's porch, where the other guests yet lingering were assembled to give the farewell greeting, there was a general conviction of the happiness destined to the affianced ones,—a general impression that both in mind and person they were eminently suited to each other. Their position was that which is ever interesting, even in more ordinary people, and

at that moment they were absolutely popular with all who gazed on them ; and when the good old Cleveland turned away with tears in his eyes and murmured " Bless them ! " there was not one of the party who would have hesitated to join the prayer.

Florence felt a nameless dejection as she quitted a spot so consecrated by grateful recollections.

" When shall we be again so happy ? " said she, softly, as she turned back to gaze upon the landscape, which, gay with flowers and shrubs, and the bright English verdure, smiled behind them like a garden.

" We will try and make my old hall, and its gloomy shades, remind us of these fairer scenes, my Florence."

" Ah ! describe to me the character of your place. We shall live there principally, shall we not ? I am sure I shall like it much better than Marsden Court, which is the name of that huge pile of arches and columns in Vanbrugh's heaviest taste, which will soon be yours."

" I fear we shall never dispose of all your mighty retinue, grooms of the chamber, and Patagonian footmen, and Heaven knows who besides, in the holes and corners of Burleigh," said Ernest, smiling. And then he went on to describe the old place with something of a well-born country gentleman's not displeasing pride ; and Florence listened, and they planned and altered, and added, and improved, and laid out a map for the future. From that topic they turned to another, equally interesting to Florence. The work in which Maltravers had been engaged was completed,

was in the hands of the printer, and Florence amused herself with conjectures as to the criticisms it would provoke. She was certain that all that had most pleased her would be *caviare* to the multitude. She never would believe that any one could understand Maltravers but herself. Thus time flew on till they passed that part of the road in which had occurred Ernest's adventure with Mrs Templeton's daughter. Maltravers paused abruptly in the midst of his glowing periods, as the spot awakened its associations and reminiscences, and looked round anxiously and inquiringly. But the fair apparition was not again visible ; and whatever impression the place produced, it gradually died away as they entered the suburbs of the great metropolis. Two other gentlemen and a young lady of thirty-three (I had almost forgotten them) were of the party, but they had the tact to linger a little behind during the greater part of the road, and the young lady, who was a wit and a flirt, found gossip and sentiment for both the cavaliers.

“Will you come to us this evening?” asked Florence, timidly.

“I fear I shall not be able. I have several matters to arrange before I leave town for Burleigh, which I must do next week. Three months, dearest Florence, will scarcely suffice to make Burleigh put on its best looks to greet its new mistress ; and I have already appointed the great modern magicians of draperies and ormolu to consult how we may make Aladdin's palace fit for the reception of the new princess. Lawyers,

too!—in short, I expect to be fully occupied. But to-morrow, at three, I shall be with you, and we can ride out, if the day be fine.”

“Surely,” said Florence, “yonder is Signor Cesarini—how haggard and altered he appears!”

Maltravers, turning his eyes towards the spot to which Florence pointed, saw Cesarini emerging from a lane, with a porter behind him carrying some books and a trunk. The Italian, who was talking and gesticulating as to himself, did not perceive them.

“Poor Castruccio! he seems leaving his lodging,” thought Maltravers. “By this time I fear he will have spent the last sum I conveyed to him—I must remember to find him out and replenish his stores. Do not forget,” said he aloud, “to see Cesarini, and urge him to accept the appointment we spoke of.”

“I will not forget it—I will see him to-morrow before we meet. Yet it is a painful task, Ernest.”

“I allow it. Alas! Florence, you owe him some reparation. He undoubtedly once conceived himself entitled to form hopes, the vanity of which his ignorance of our English world and his foreign birth prevented him from suspecting.”

“Believe me, I did not give him the right to form such expectations.”

“But you did not sufficiently discourage them. Ah, Florence, never underrate the pangs of hope crushed, of love contemned.”

“Dreadful!” said Florence, almost shuddering. “It is strange, but my conscience never so smote me

before. It is since I love, that I feel for the first time, how guilty a creature is——”

“A coquette!” interrupted Maltravers. “Well, let us think of the past no more; but if we can restore a gifted man, whose youth promised much, to an honourable independence and a healthful mind, let us do so. Me, Cesarini never can forgive; he will think I have robbed him of you. But we men—the woman we have once loved, even after she rejects us, ever has some power over us, and your eloquence, which has so often roused me, cannot fail to impress a nature yet more excitable.”

Maltravers, on quitting Florence at her own door, went home, summoned his favourite servant, gave him Cesarini’s address at Chelsea, bade him find out where he was, if he had left his lodgings; and leave at his present home, or (failing its discovery) at the “Travellers,” a cover, which he made his servant address, enclosing a bank-note of some amount. If the reader wonders why Maltravers thus constituted himself the unknown benefactor of the Italian, I must tell him that he does not understand Maltravers. Cesarini was not the only man of letters whose faults he pitied, whose wants he relieved. Though his name seldom shone in the pompous list of public subscriptions, though he disdained to affect the Mæcenas and the patron, he felt the brotherhood of mankind, and a kind of gratitude for those who aspired to raise or to delight their species. An author himself, he could appreciate the vast debt which the world owes to

authors, and pays but by calumny in life and barren laurels after death. He whose profession is the Beautiful succeeds only through the Sympathies. Charity and Compassion are virtues taught with difficulty to ordinary men ; to true Genius they are but the instincts which direct it to the Destiny it is born to fulfil,—viz., the discovery and redemption of new tracts in our common nature. Genius—the Sublime Missionary—goes forth from the serene Intellect of the Author to live in the wants, the griefs, the infirmities of others, in order that it may learn their language ; and as its highest achievement is Pathos, so its most absolute requisite is Pity !

CHAPTER VII.

Don John. How canst thou cross this marriage?

Borachio. Not honestly, my lord; but so covertly, that no dishonesty shall appear in me, my lord.—*Much Ado about Nothing.*

FERRERS and Cesarini were sitting over their wine, and both had sunk into silence, for they had only one subject in common, when a note was brought to Lumley from Lady Florence. "This is lucky enough!" said he, as he read it. "Lady Florence wishes to see you, and encloses me a note for you, which she asks me to address and forward to you. There it is."

Cesarini took the note with trembling hands: it was very short, and merely expressed a desire to see him the next day at two o'clock.

"What can it be?" he exclaimed; "can she want to apologise, to explain?"

"No, no, no! Florence will not do that; but, from certain words she dropped in talking with me, I guess that she has some offer to your worldly advantage to propose to you. Ha! by the way, a thought strikes me."

Lumley eagerly rang the bell. "Is Lady Florence's servant waiting for an answer?"

"Yes, sir."

“Very well—detain him.”

“Now, Cesarini, assurance is made doubly sure. Come into the next room. There, sit down at my desk, and write, as I shall dictate, to Maltravers.”

“I !”

“Yes, now *do* put yourself in my hands—write, write. When you have finished, I will explain.”

Cesarini obeyed, and the letter was as follows :—

“DEAR MALTRAVERS, —I have learned your approaching marriage with Lady Florence Lascelles. Permit me to congratulate you. For myself, I have overcome a vain and foolish passion ; and can contemplate your happiness without a sigh.

“I have reviewed all my old prejudices against marriage, and believe it to be a state which nothing but the most perfect congeniality of temper, pursuits, and minds, can render bearable. How rare is such congeniality ! in your case it may exist. The affections of that beautiful being are doubtless ardent—and they are yours !

“Write me a line by the bearer to assure me of your belief in my sincerity.—Yours, C. CESARINI.”

“Copy out this letter, I want its ditto—quick. Now seal and direct the duplicate,” continued Ferrers ; “that’s right ; go into the hall, give it yourself to Lady Florence’s servant, and beg him to take it to Seamore Place, wait for an answer, and bring it here ; by which time you will have a note ready for Lady Florence.

Say I will mention this to her ladyship—and give the man half-a-crown. There—begone!”

“I do not understand a word of this,” said Cesarini, when he returned; “will you explain?”

“Certainly; the copy of the note you have despatched to Maltravers I shall show to Lady Florence this evening, as a proof of your sobered and generous feelings; observe, it is so written, that the old letter of your rival may seem an exact reply to it. To-morrow a reference to this note of yours will bring out our scheme more easily; and if you follow my instructions, you will not seem to *volunteer* showing our handiwork, as we at first intended; but rather to yield it to her eyes from a generous impulse, from an irresistible desire to save her from an unworthy husband and a wretched fate. Fortune has been dealing our cards for us, and has turned up the ace. Three to one now on the odd trick. Maltravers, too, is at home. I called at his house on returning from my uncle’s, and learned that he would not stir out all the evening.”

In due time came the answer from Ernest: it was short and hurried; but full of all the manly kindness of his nature; it expressed admiration and delight at the tone of Cesarini’s letter; it revoked all former expressions derogatory to Lady Florence; it owned the harshness and error of his first impressions; it used every delicate argument that could soothe and reconcile Cesarini; and concluded by sentiments of friendship and desire of service, so cordial, so honest, so free from the affectation of patronage, that even Cesarini himself,

half insane as he was with passion, was almost softened. Lumley saw the change in his countenance—snatched the letter from his hand—read it—threw it into the fire—and saying, “We must guard against accidents,” clapped the Italian affectionately on the shoulder, and added, “Now you can have no remorse; for a more Jesuitical piece of insulting, hypocritical cant I never read. Where’s your note to Lady Florence? Your compliments, you will be with her at two. There now, the rehearsal’s over, the scenes arranged, and I’ll dress, and open the play for you with a prologue.”

CHAPTER VIII.

Æstuat ingens

*Imo in corde pudor, mixtoque insania luctu,
Et furiis agitatus amor, et conscia virtus.*—VIRGIL.*

THE next day, punctual to his appointment, Cesarini repaired to his critical interview with Lady Florence. Her countenance, which, like that of most persons whose temper is not under their command, ever too faithfully expressed what was within, was unusually flushed. Lumley had dropped words and hints which had driven sleep from her pillow, and repose from her mind.

She rose from her seat with nervous agitation as Cesarini entered and made his grave salutation. After a short and embarrassed pause, she recovered, however, her self-possession, and with all a woman's delicate and dexterous tact, urged upon the Italian the expediency of accepting the offer of honourable independence now extended to him.

“You have abilities,” she said, in conclusion, “you have friends, you have youth ; take advantage of those gifts of nature and fortune, and fulfil such a career as,”

* Deep in her inmost heart is stirred the immense shame, and madness with commingled grief, and love agitated by rage, and conscious virtue.

added Lady Florence, with a smile, "Dante did not consider incompatible with poetry."

"I cannot object to any career," said Cesarini, with an effort, "that may serve to remove me from a country that has no longer any charms for me. I thank you for your kindness; I will obey you. May you be happy; and yet—no, ah! no—happy you must be! Even *he*, sooner or later, must see you with my eyes."

"I know," replied Florence, falteringly, "that you have wisely and generously mastered a past illusion. Mr Ferrers allowed me to see the letter you wrote to Er——, to Mr Maltravers; it was worthy of you: it touched me deeply; but I trust you will outlive your prejudices against——"

"Stay," interrupted Cesarini; "did Ferrers communicate to you the answer to that letter?"

"No, indeed."

"I am glad of it."

"Why?"

"Oh, no matter. Heaven bless you; farewell."

"No; I implore you, do not go yet: what was there in that letter that it could pain me to see? Lumley hinted darkly, but would not speak out: be more frank."

"I cannot: it would be treachery to Maltravers, cruelty to you; yet, would it be cruel?"

"No, it would not: it would be kindness and mercy; show me the letter—you have it with you."

"You could not bear it; you would hate me for the pain it would give you. Let me depart."

“Man, you wrong Maltravers. I see it now. You would darkly slander him whom you cannot openly defame. Go; I was wrong to listen to you—go!”

“Lady Florence, beware how you taunt me into undeceiving you. Here is the letter, it is his handwriting: will you read it? I warn you not.”

“I will believe nothing but the evidence of my own eyes; give it me.”

“Stay then; on two conditions. First, that you promise me sacredly that you will not disclose to Maltravers, without my consent, that you have seen this letter. Think not I fear his anger. No! but in the mortal encounter that must ensue, if you thus betray me, your character would be lowered in the world’s eyes, and even I (my excuse unknown) might not appear to have acted with honour in obeying your desire, and warning you, while there is yet time, of bartering love for avarice. Promise me.”

“I do, I do most solemnly.”

“Secondly, assure me that you will not ask to keep the letter, but will immediately restore it to me.”

“I promise it. Now then.”

“Take the letter.”

Florence seized, and rapidly read the fatal and garbled document: her brain was dizzy, her eyes clouded, her ears rang as with the sound of water, she was sick and giddy with emotion; but she read enough. This letter was written, then, in answer to Castruccio’s of last night; it avowed dislike of her character; it denied the sincerity of her love; it more than hinted

the mercenary nature of his own feelings. Yes, even there, where she had garnered up her heart, she was not Florence, the lovely and beloved woman; but Florence, the wealthy and high-born heiress. The world which she had built upon the faith and heart of Maltravers, crumbled away at her feet. The letter dropped from her hands; her whole form seemed to shrink and shrivel up; her teeth were set, and her cheek was as white as marble.

“O God!” cried Cesarini, stung with remorse. “Speak to me, speak to me, Florence! I did wrong; forget that hateful letter! I have been false—false!”

“Ah, false—say so again!—no, no, I remember *he* told me—he, so wise, so deep a judge of human character, that he would be sponsor for your faith—that your honour and heart were incorruptible. It is true; I thank you—you have saved me from a terrible fate.”

“O, Lady Florence, dear—too dear—yet, would that—alas! she does not listen to me,” muttered Castruccio, as Florence, pressing her hands to her temples, walked wildly to and fro the room; at length she paused opposite to Cesarini, looked him full in the face, returned him the letter without a word, and pointed to the door.

“No, no, do not bid me leave you yet,” said Cesarini, trembling with repentant emotion, yet half beside himself with jealous rage at her love for his rival.

“My friend, go,” said Florence, in a tone of voice singularly subdued and soft. “Do not fear me; I

have more pride in me than even affection ; but there are certain struggles in a woman's breast which she could never betray to any one—any one but a mother. God help me, I have none ! Go ; when next we meet, I shall be calm.”

She held out her hand as she spoke, the Italian dropped on his knee, kissed it convulsively, and, fearful of trusting himself further, vanished from the room.

He had not been long gone before Maltravers was seen riding through the street. As he threw himself from his horse, he looked up at the window, and kissed his hand at Lady Florence, who stood there, watching his arrival with feelings indeed far different from those he anticipated. He entered the room lightly and gaily.

Florence stirred not to welcome him. He approached and took her hand ; she withdrew it with a shudder.

“Are you not well, Florence ? ”

“I am well, for I have recovered.”

“What do you mean ? why do you turn from me ? ”

Lady Florence fixed her eyes upon him, eyes that literally blazed ; her lip quivered with scorn.

“Mr Maltravers, at length I know you. I understand the feelings with which you have sought a union between us. O God ! why, why was I thus cursed with riches—why made a thing of barter and merchandise, and avarice, and low ambition ? Take my wealth, take it, Mr Maltravers, since that is what you prize. Heaven knows I can cast it willingly away ;

but leave the wretch whom you long deceived, and who now, wretch though she be, renounces and despises you !”

“Lady Florence, do I hear aright? Who has accused me to you?”

“None, sir, none; I would have believed none. Let it suffice that I am convinced that our union can be happy to neither; question me no further; all intercourse between us is for ever over !”

“Pause,” said Maltravers, with cold and grave solemnity; “another word, and the gulf will become impassable. Pause.”

“Do not,” exclaimed the unhappy lady, stung by what she considered the assurance of a hardened hypocrisy—“do not affect this haughty superiority; it dupes me no longer. I was your slave while I loved you: the tie is broken. I am free, and I hate and scorn you! Mercenary and sordid as you are, your baseness of spirit revives the differences of our rank. Henceforth, Mr Maltravers, I am Lady Florence Lascelles, and by that title alone will you know me. Begone, sir !”

As she spoke, with passion distorting every feature of her face, all her beauty vanished away from the eyes of the proud Maltravers, as if by witchcraft: the angel seemed transformed into the fury; and cold, bitter, and withering was the eye which he fixed upon that altered countenance.

“Mark me, Lady Florence Lascelles,” said he, very calmly, “you have now said what you can never recall. Neither in man nor in woman did Ernest Maltravers

ever forget or forgive a sentence which accused him of dishonour. I bid you farewell for ever ; and with my last words I condemn you to the darkest of all dooms—the remorse that comes too late !”

Slowly he moved away ; and as the door closed upon that towering and haughty form, Florence already felt that his curse was working to its fulfilment. She rushed to the window—she caught one last glimpse of him as his horse bore him rapidly away. Ah ! when shall they meet again ?

CHAPTER IX.

And now I live—O wherefore do I live?

And with that pang I prayed to be no more.—WORDSWORTH.

It was about nine o'clock that evening, and Maltravers was alone in his room. His carriage was at the door—his servants were arranging the luggage—he was going that night to Burleigh. London—society—the world—were grown hateful to him. His galled and indignant spirit demanded solitude. At this time Lumley Ferrers abruptly entered.

“You will pardon my intrusion,” said the latter, with his usual frankness—“but——”

“But what, sir? I am engaged.”

“I shall be very brief. Maltravers, you are my old friend. I retain regard and affection for you, though our different habits have of late estranged us. I come to you from my cousin—from Florence—there has been some misunderstanding between you. I called on her to-day after you left the house. Her grief affected me. I have only just quitted her. She has been told by some gossip or other, some story or other—women are credulous, foolish creatures;—undeceive her, and, I daresay, all may be settled.”

“Ferrers, if a man had spoken to me as Lady Florence did, his blood or mine must have flowed. And do you think that words that might have plunged me into the guilt of homicide if uttered by a man, I could ever pardon in one whom I had dreamed of for a wife? Never!”

“Pooh, pooh—women’s words are wind. Don’t throw away so splendid a match for such a trifle.”

“Do you too, sir, mean to impute mercenary motives to me?”

“Heaven forbid! You know I am no coward, but I really don’t want to fight you. Come, be reasonable.”

“I daresay you mean well, but the breach is final—all recurrence to it is painful and superfluous. I must wish you good evening.”

“You have positively decided?”

“I have.”

“Even if Lady Florence made the *amende honorable!*”

“Nothing on the part of Lady Florence could alter my resolution. The woman whom an honourable man—an English gentleman—makes the partner of his life, ought never to listen to a syllable against his fair name: his honour is hers, and if her lips, that should breathe comfort in calumny, only serve to retail the lie—she may be beautiful, gifted, wealthy, and high-born, but he takes a curse to his arms. That curse I have escaped.”

“And this I am to say to my cousin?”

“As you will. And now stay, Lumley Ferrers, and hear me. I neither accuse nor suspect you, I desire not to pierce your heart, and in this case I cannot fathom your motives; but if it should so have happened that you have, in any way, ministered to Lady Florence Lascelles’s injurious opinions of my faith and honour, you will have much to answer for, and sooner or later there will come a day of reckoning between you and me.”

“Mr Maltravers, there can be no quarrel between us, with my cousin’s fair name at stake, or else we should not now part without preparations for a more hostile meeting. I can bear your language. *I*, too, though no philosopher, can forgive. Come, man, you are heated—it is very natural;—let us part friends—your hand.”

“If you can take my hand, Lumley, you are innocent, and I have wronged you.”

Lumley smiled, and cordially pressed the hand of his old friend.

As he descended the stairs, Maltravers followed; and just as Lumley turned into Curzon Street, the carriage whirled rapidly past him, and by the lamps he saw the pale and stern face of Maltravers.

It was a slow, drizzling rain—one of those unwholesome nights frequent in London towards the end of autumn. Ferrers, however, insensible to the weather, walked slowly and thoughtfully towards his cousin’s house. He was playing for a mighty stake, and hitherto

the cast was in his favour, yet he was uneasy and perturbed. His conscience was tolerably proof to all compunction, as much from the levity as from the strength of his nature ; and (Maltravers removed) he trusted in his knowledge of the human heart, and the smooth speciousness of his manner, to win, at last, in the hand of Lady Florence, the object of his ambition. It was not on her affection, it was on her pique, her resentment, that he relied. "When a woman fancies herself slighted by the man she loves, the first person who proposes must be a clumsy wooer indeed, if he does not carry her away." So reasoned Ferrers, but yet he was ruffled and disquieted ; the truth must be spoken—able, bold, sanguine, and scornful as he was, his spirit quailed before that of Maltravers ; he feared the lion of that nature when fairly aroused : his own character had in it something of a woman's—an unprincipled, gifted, aspiring, and subtle woman's ; and in Maltravers—stern, simple, and masculine—he recognised the superior dignity of the "lords of the creation ;" he was overawed by the anticipation of a wrath and revenge which he felt he merited, and which he feared might be deadly.

While gradually, however, his spirit recovered its usual elasticity, he came in the vicinity of Lord Saxonham's house, and suddenly, by a corner of the street, his arm was seized : to his inexpressible astonishment he recognised in the muffled figure that accosted him, the form of Florence Lascelles.

“Good heavens!” he cried, “is it possible?—You, alone in the streets, at this hour, in such a night, too! How very wrong—how very imprudent!”

“Do not talk to me—I am almost mad as it is: I could not rest—I could not brave quiet, solitude,—still less, the face of my father—I could not!—but quick, what says he?—what excuse has he? Tell me everything—I will cling to a straw.”

“And is this the proud Florence Lascelles?”

“No,—it is the humbled Florence Lascelles. I have done with pride—speak to me!”

“Ah, what a treasure is such a heart! How can he throw it away!”

“Does he deny?”

“He denies nothing—he expresses himself rejoiced to have escaped—such was his expression—a marriage in which his heart never was engaged. He is unworthy of you—forget him.”

Florence shivered, and as Ferrers drew her arm in his own, her ungloved hand touched his, and the touch was like that of ice.

“What will the servants think?—what excuse can we make?” said Ferrers, when they stood beneath the porch.

Florence did not reply: but as the door opened, she said softly—

“I am ill—ill,” and clung to Ferrers with that unnerved and heavy weight which betokens faintness.

The light glared on her—the faces of the lackeys

betokened their undisguised astonishment. With a violent effort, Florence recovered herself, for she had *not* yet done with pride, swept through the hall with her usual stately step, slowly ascended the broad staircase, and gained the solitude of her own room, to fall senseless on the floor.

BOOK IX.

Ἄχέροντι νυμφεύσω.—SOPH. *Antig.* 81.

I go, the bride of Acheron.

Μελλοντα ταῦτα.—*Ib.* 1333.

These things are in the Future.

BOOK IX.

CHAPTER I.

There the action lies
In its true nature.
What then? What rests?
Try what repentance can!—*Hamlet.*
I doubt he will be dead or ere I come.—*King John.*

It was a fine afternoon in December, when Lumley Ferrers turned from Lord Saxingham's door. The knockers were muffled—the windows on the third storey were partially closed. There was sickness in that house.

Lumley's face was unusually grave; it was even sad. "So young—so beautiful," he muttered. "If ever I loved woman, I do believe I loved her:—that love must be my excuse. . . . I repent of what I have done; but I could not foresee that a mere lover's stratagem was to end in such effects. The metaphysician was very right when he said, 'We only sympathise with feelings we know ourselves.' A little disappointment in love could not have hurt me much—it is d—d odd it should hurt her so. I am altogether out of luck: old Templeton—I beg his pardon, Lord Vargrave (by

the by he gets heartier every day—what a constitution he has !) seems cross with me. He did not like the idea that I should marry Lady Florence—and when I thought that vision might have been realised, hinted that I was disappointing some expectations he had formed ; I can't make out what he means. Then, too, the government have offered that place to Maltravers instead of to me. In fact, my star is not in the ascendant. Poor Florence, though,—I would really give a great deal to know her restored to health!—I have done a villanous thing, but I thought it only a clever one. However, regret is a fool's passion. By Jupiter!—talking of fools, here comes Cesarini.”

Wan, haggard, almost spectral, his hat over his brows, his dress neglected, his air reckless and fierce, Cesarini crossed the way, and thus accosted Lumley :—

“We have murdered her, Ferrers ; and her ghost will haunt us to our dying day !”

“Talk prose ; you know I am no poet. What do you mean ?”

“She is worse to-day,” groaned Cesarini, in a hollow voice. “I wander like a lost spirit round the house ; I question all who come from it. Tell me,—oh, tell me, is there hope ?”

“I do, indeed, trust so,” replied Ferrers, fervently. “The illness has only of late assumed an alarming appearance. At first it was merely a severe cold, caught by imprudent exposure one rainy night. Now they fear it has settled on the lungs ; but if we could get her abroad, all might be well.”

“You think so, honestly?”

“I do. Courage, my friend; do not reproach yourself; it has nothing to do with us. She was taken ill of a cold, not of a letter, man!”

“No, no; I judge her heart by my own. Oh, that I could recall the past! Look at me; I am the wreck of what I was; day and night the recollection of my falsehood haunts me with remorse.”

“Pshaw!—we will go to Italy together, and in your beautiful land, love will replace love.”

“I am half resolved, Ferrers.”

“Ha!—to do what?”

“To write—to reveal all to her.”

The hardy complexion of Ferrers grew livid; his brow became dark with a terrible expression.

“Do so, and fall the next day by my hand; my aim, in slighter quarrel, never erred.”

“Do you dare to threaten me?”

“Do you dare to betray me? Betray one who, if he sinned, sinned on your account—in your cause; who would have secured to you the loveliest bride, and the most princely dower, in England; and whose only offence against you is that he cannot command life and health?”

“Forgive me,” said the Italian, with great emotion, —“forgive me, and do not misunderstand; I would not have betrayed *you*,—there is honour among villains. I would have confessed only my own crime; I would never have revealed yours—why should I? it is unnecessary.”

“Are you in earnest?—are you sincere?”

“By my soul!”

“Then, indeed, you are worthy of my friendship. You will assume the whole forgery—an ugly word, but it avoids circumlocution—to be your own?”

“I will.”

Ferrers paused a moment, and then stopped suddenly short.

“You will swear this!”

“By all that is holy.”

“Then, mark me, Cesarini; if to-morrow Lady Florence be worse, I will throw no obstacle in the way of your confession, should you resolve to make it: I will even use that influence which you leave me, to palliate your offence, to win your pardon. And yet to resign your hopes—to surrender one so loved to the arms of one so hated—it is magnanimous—it is noble—it is above my standard! Do as you will.”

Cesarini was about to reply, when a servant on horse-back abruptly turned the corner, almost at full speed. He pulled in—his eye fell upon Lumley—he dismounted.

“Oh, Mr Ferrers,” said the man, breathlessly, “I have been to your house; they told me I might find you at Lord Saxingham’s—I was just going there——”

“Well, well! what is the matter?”

“My poor master, sir—my lord, I mean——”

“What of him?”

“Had a fit, sir—the doctors are with him; my mistress—for my lord can’t speak—sent me express for you.”

“Lend me your horse—there, just lengthen the stirrups.”

While the groom was engaged at the saddle, Ferrers turned to Cesarini. “Do nothing rashly,” said he; “I would say, if I might, nothing at all, without consulting me; but mind, I rely, at all events, on your promise—your oath.”

“You may,” said Cesarini, gloomily.

“Farewell, then,” said Lumley, as he mounted; and in a few moments he was out of sight.

CHAPTER II.

O world, thou wast the forest to this hart,
Dost thou here lie?—*Julius Cæsar.*

As Lumley lept from his horse at his uncle's door, the disorder and bustle of those demesnes, in which the severe eye of the master usually preserved a repose and silence as complete as if the affairs of life were carried on by clockwork, struck upon him sensibly. Upon the trim lawn, the old women employed in cleaning and weeding the walks were all assembled in a cluster, shaking their heads ominously in concert, and carrying on their comments in a confused whisper. In the hall, the housemaid (and it was the first housemaid whom Lumley had ever seen in that house, so invisibly were the wheels of the domestic machine carried on) was leaning on her broom, "swallowing with open mouth a footman's news." It was as if, with the first slackening of the rigid rein, human nature broke loose from the conventual stillness in which it had ever paced its peaceful path in that formal mansion.

"How is he?"

"My lord is better, sir; he has spoken, I believe."

At this moment a young face, swollen and red with weeping, looked down from the stairs ; and presently Evelyn rushed breathlessly into the hall.

“ Oh, come up—come up, cousin Lumley ; he cannot, cannot die in your presence ; you always seem *so full* of life ! He cannot die ; you do not think he will die ? Oh, take me with you ; they won't let me go to him ! ”

“ Hush, my dear little girl, hush ; follow me lightly—that is right.”

Lumley reached the door, tapped gently—entered ; and the child also stole in unobserved, or at least unprevented. Lumley drew aside the curtains ; the new lord was lying on his bed, with his head propped by pillows, his eyes wide open, with a glassy but not insensible stare, and his countenance fearfully changed. Lady Vargrave was kneeling on the other side of the bed, one hand clasped in her husband's, the other bathing his temples, and her tears falling, without sob or sound, fast and copiously down her pale fair cheeks.

Two doctors were conferring in the recess of the window ; an apothecary was mixing drugs at a table ; and two of the oldest female servants of the house were standing near the physicians, trying to overhear what was said.

“ My dear, dear uncle, how are you ? ” asked Lumley.

“ Ah, you are come then,” said the dying man, in a feeble yet distinct voice ; “ that is well—I have much to say to you.”

“But not now—not now; you are not strong enough,” said the wife, imploringly.

The doctors moved to the bedside. Lord Vargrave waved his hand, and raised his head.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “I feel as if death were hastening upon me; I have much need, while my senses remain, to confer with my nephew. Is the present a fitting time?—if I delay, are you sure that I shall have another?”

The doctors looked at each other.

“My lord,” said one, “it may perhaps settle and relieve your mind to converse with your nephew; afterwards you may more easily compose yourself to sleep.”

“Take this cordial, then,” said the other doctor.

The sick man obeyed. One of the physicians approached Lumley, and beckoned him aside.

“Shall we send for his lordship’s lawyer?” whispered the leech.

“I am his heir-at-law,” thought Lumley. “Why, *no*, my dear sir—no, I think not, unless he expresses a desire to see him; doubtless my poor uncle has already settled his worldly affairs. What is his state?”

The doctor shook his head. “I will speak to you, sir, after you have left his lordship.”

“What is the matter there?” cried the patient, sharply and querulously. “Clear the room—I would be alone with my nephew.”

The doctors disappeared; the old women reluctantly followed; when, suddenly, the little Evelyn sprang

forward and threw herself on the breast of the dying man, sobbing as if her heart would break.

“My poor child!—my sweet child!—my own, own darling!” gasped out Lord Vargrave, folding his weak arms round her; “bless you—bless you! and God *will* bless you. My wife,” he added, with a voice far more tender than Lumley had ever before heard him address to Lady Vargrave, “if these be the last words I utter to you, let them express all the gratitude I feel for you, for duties never more piously discharged: you did not love me, it is true; and in health and pride that knowledge often made me unjust to you. I have been severe—you have had much to bear—forgive me.”

“Oh! do not talk thus; you have been nobler, kinder than my deserts. How much I owe you!—how little I have done in return!”

“I cannot bear this; leave me, my dear—leave me. I may live yet—I hope I may; I do not want to die. The cup may pass from me. Go—go—and you, my child.”

“Ah, let *me* stay.”

Lord Vargrave kissed the little creature, as she clung to his neck, with passionate affection, and then, placing her in her mother's arms, fell back exhausted on his pillow. Lumley, with handkerchief to his eyes, opened the door to Lady Vargrave, who sobbed bitterly, and, carefully closing it, resumed his station by his uncle.

When Lumley Ferrers left the room, his counte-

nance was gloomy and excited rather than sad. He hurried to the room which he usually occupied, and remained there for some hours while his uncle slept—a long and sound sleep. But the mother and the step-child (now restored to the sick-room) did not desert their watch.

It wanted about an hour to midnight when the senior physician sought the nephew.

“Your uncle asks for you, Mr Ferrers; and I think it right to say that his last moments approach. We have done all that can be done.”

“Is he fully aware of his danger?”

“He is; and has spent the last two hours in prayer—it is a Christian’s deathbed, sir.”

“Humph!” said Ferrers, as he followed the physician.

The room was darkened—a single lamp, carefully shaded, burned on a table, on which lay the Book of Life in Death; and with awe and grief on their faces, the mother and the child were kneeling beside the bed.

“Come here, Lumley,” faltered forth the fast-dying man. “There are none here, but you three—nearest and dearest to me?—that is well. Lumley, then, you know all—my wife, he knows all. My child, give your hand to your cousin—so you are now plighted. When you grow up, Evelyn, you will know that it is my last wish and prayer that you should be the wife of Lumley Ferrers. In giving you this angel, Lumley, I atone to you for all seeming injustice. And to you, my child, I secure the rank and honours to which I

have painfully climbed, and which I am forbidden to enjoy. Be kind to her, Lumley—you have a good and frank heart; let it be her shelter—she has never known a harsh word. God bless you all, and God forgive me—pray for me. Lumley, to-morrow you will be Lord Vargrave, and by - and - by” (here a ghastly but exultant smile flitted over the speaker’s countenance) “you will be my Lady—Lady Vargrave. Lady—so—so—Lady Var——”

The words died on his trembling lips; he turned round, and though he continued to breathe for more than an hour, Lord Vargrave never uttered another syllable.

CHAPTER III.

Hopes and fears

Start up alarmed, and o'er life's narrow verge
Look down—on what?—a fathomless abyss.—YOUNG.

Contempt, farewell ; and maiden pride, adieu !

Much Ado about Nothing.

THE wound which Maltravers had received was peculiarly severe and rankling. It is true that he had never been what is called violently in love with Florence Lascelles ; but from the moment in which he had been charmed and surprised into the character of a declared suitor, it was consonant with his scrupulous and loyal nature to view only the bright side of Florence's gifts and qualities, and to seek to enamour his grateful fancy with her beauty, her genius, and her tenderness for himself. He had thus forced and formed his thoughts and hopes to centre all in one object ; and Florence and the Future had grown words which conveyed the same meaning to his mind. Perhaps he felt more bitterly her sudden and stunning accusations, couched as they were in language so unqualified, because they fell upon his pride rather than his affection, and were not softened away by the thousand excuses and remembrances which a passionate love would have invented and recalled. It was a deep, concentrated sense of injury

and insult, that hardened and soured his whole nature—wounded vanity, wounded pride, and wounded honour. And the blow, too, came upon him at a time when he was most dissatisfied with all other prospects. He was disgusted with the littleness of the agents and springs of political life—he had formed a weary contempt of the barrenness of literary reputation. At thirty years of age he had necessarily outlived the sanguine elasticity of early youth, and he had already broken up many of those later toys in business and ambition which afford the rattle and the hobby-horse to our maturer manhood. Always asking for something too refined and too exalted for human life, every new proof of unworthiness in men and things saddened or revolted a mind still too fastidious for that quiet contentment with the world as it is, which we must all learn before we can make our philosophy practical and our genius as fertile of the harvest, as it may be prodigal of the blossom. Haughty, solitary, and unsocial, the ordinary resources of mortified and disappointed men were not for Ernest Maltravers. Rigidly secluded in his country retirement, he consumed the days in moody wanderings; and in the evenings he turned to books with a spirit disdainful and fatigued. So much had he already learned, that books taught him little that he did not already know. And the biographies of Authors, those ghost-like beings who seem to have had no life but in the shadow of their own haunting and imperishable thoughts, dimmed the inspiration he might have caught from their pages.

Those Slaves of the Lamp, those Silkworms of the Closet, how little had they enjoyed, how little had they lived! Condemned to a mysterious fate by the wholesale destinies of the world, they seemed born but to toil and to spin thoughts for the common crowd—and, their task performed in drudgery and in darkness, to die when no further service could be wrung from their exhaustion. Names had they been in life, and as names they lived for ever, in life as in death, airy and unsubstantial phantoms. It pleased Maltravers at this time to turn a curious eye towards the obscure and half-extinct philosophies of the ancient world. He compared the Stoics with the Epicureans—those Epicureans who had given their own version to the simple and abstemious utilitarianism of their master. He asked which was the wiser, to sharpen pain or to deaden pleasure—to bear all or to enjoy all—and, by a natural reaction which often happens to us in life, this man, hitherto so earnest, active-spirited, and resolved on great things, began to yearn for the drowsy pleasures of indolence. The Garden grew more tempting than the Porch. He seriously revolved the old alternative of the Grecian demi-god—might it not be wiser to abandon the grave pursuits to which he had been addicted, to dethrone the august but severe Ideal in his heart, to cultivate the light loves and voluptuous trifles of the herd, and to plant the brief space of youth yet left to him with the myrtle and the rose? As water flows over water, so new schemes rolled upon new—sweeping away every momentary impression, and

leaving the surface facile equally to receive and to forget. Such is a common state with men of imagination in those crises of life, when some great revolution of designs and hopes unsettles elements too susceptible of every changing wind. And thus the weak are destroyed, while the strong relapse, after terrible but unknown convulsions, into that solemn harmony and order from which Destiny and God draw their uses to mankind.

It was from this irresolute contest between antagonist principles that Maltravers was aroused by the following letter from Florence Lascelles :—

“For three days and three sleepless nights I have debated with myself whether or not I ought to address you. Oh, Ernest, were I what I was, in health, in pride, I might fear that, generous as you are, you would misconstrue my appeal; but that is now impossible. Our union never can take place, and my hopes bound themselves to one sweet and melancholy hope, that you will remove from my last hours the cold and dark shadow of your resentment. We have both been cruelly deceived and betrayed. Three days ago I discovered the perfidy that has been practised against us. And then, ah! then, with all the weak human anguish of discovering it too late (*your curse is fulfilled, Ernest!*) I had at least one moment of proud, of exquisite rapture. Ernest Maltravers, the hero of my dreams, stood pure and lofty as of old—a thing it was not unworthy to love, to mourn, to die for. A letter in your handwriting had been shown me, garbled and altered,

as it seems—but I detected not the imposture—it was yourself, yourself alone, brought in false and horrible witness against yourself! And could you think that any other evidence, the words, the oaths of others, would have convicted you in my eyes? There you wronged me. But I deserved it—I had bound myself to secrecy—the seal is taken from my lips in order to be set upon my tomb. Ernest, beloved Ernest—beloved till the last breath is extinct—till the last throb of this heart is stilled!—write me one word of comfort and of pardon. You will believe what I have imperfectly written, for *you* ever trusted my faith, if you have blamed my faults. I am now comparatively happy—a word from you will make me blest. And Fate has, perhaps, been more merciful to both than, in our short-sighted and querulous human vision, we might perhaps believe; for, now that the frame is brought low, and in the solitude of my chamber I can duly and humbly commune with mine own heart, I see the aspect of those faults which I once mistook for virtues, and feel that, had we been united, I, loving you ever, might not have constituted your happiness, and so have known the misery of losing your affection. May He who formed you for glorious and yet all-unaccomplished purposes, strengthen you, when these eyes can no longer sparkle at your triumphs, nor weep at your lightest sorrow. You will go on in your broad and luminous career:—A few years, and my remembrance will have left but the vestige of a dream behind.—But, but—I can write no more. God bless you!”

CHAPTER IV.

Oh, stop this headlong current of your goodness ;
It comes too fast upon a feeble soul.

DRYDEN, *Sebastian and Doras*.

THE smooth physician had paid his evening visit ; Lord Saxingham had gone to a cabinet dinner, for Life must ever walk side by side with Death : and Lady Florence Lascelles was alone. It was a room adjoining her sleeping-apartment—a room in which, in the palmy days of the brilliant and wayward heiress, she had loved to display her fanciful and peculiar taste. There had she been accustomed to muse, to write, to study—there had she first been dazzled by the novel glow of Ernest's undiurnal and stately thoughts—there had she first conceived the romance of girlhood, which had led her to confer with him, unknown—there had she first confessed to herself that fancy had begotten love—there had she gone through love's short and exhausting progress of lone emotion ;—the doubt, the hope, the ecstasy ; the reverse, the terror ; the inanimate despondency, the agonised despair ! And there now, sadly and patiently, she awaited the gradual march of inevitable decay. And books and pictures, and musical instruments and

marble busts, half shadowed by classic draperies—and all the delicate elegancies of womanly refinement—still invested the chamber with a grace as cheerful as if youth and beauty were to be the occupants for ever, and the dark and noisome vault were not the only lasting residence for the things of clay !

Florence Lascelles was dying ; but not indeed wholly of that common, if mystic malady, a broken heart. Her health, always delicate, because always preyed upon by a nervous, irritable, and feverish spirit, had been gradually and invisibly undermined, even before Ernest confessed his love. In the singular lustre of those large-pupilled eyes—in the luxuriant transparency of that glorious bloom—the experienced might long since have traced the seeds which cradled death. In the night, when her restless and maddened heart so imprudently drove her forth to forestall the communication of Lumley (whom she had sent to Maltravers, she scarce knew for what object, or with what hope), in that night she was already in a high state of fever. The rain and the chill struck the growing disease within—her excitement gave it food and fire—delirium succeeded ; and in that most fearful and fatal of all medical errors, which robs the frame, when it most needs strength, of the very principle of life, they had bled her into a temporary calm, and into permanent and incurable weakness. Consumption seized its victim. The physicians who attended her were the most renowned in London, and Lord Saxingham was firmly persuaded that there was no danger. It was not in his nature to

think that death would take so great a liberty with Lady Florence Lascelles, when there were so many poor people in the world whom there would be no impropriety in removing from it. But Florence knew her danger, and her high spirit did not quail before it. Yet, when Cesarini, stung beyond endurance by the horrors of his remorse, wrote and confessed all his own share of the fatal treason, though, faithful to his promise, he concealed that of his accomplice,—then, ah then, she did indeed repine at her doom, and long to look once more with the eyes of love and joy upon the face of the beautiful world. But the illness of the body usually brings out a latent power and philosophy of the soul, which health never knows; and God has mercifully ordained it as the customary lot of nature, that in proportion as we decline into the grave, the sloping path is made smooth and easy to our feet; and every day, as the films of clay are removed from our eyes, Death loses the false aspect of the spectre, and we fall at last into its arms as a wearied child upon the bosom of its mother.

It was with a heavy heart that Lady Florence listened to the monotonous clicking of the clock that announced the departure of moments few, yet not precious, still spared to her. Her face buried in her hands, she bent over the small table beside her sofa, and indulged her melancholy thoughts. Bowed was the haughty crest, unnerved the elastic shape that had once seemed born for majesty and command: no friends were near, for Florence had never made friends. Soli-

tary had been her youth, and solitary were her dying hours.

As she thus sat and mused, a sound of carriage wheels in the street below slightly shook the room—it ceased—the carriage stopped at the door. Florence looked up. “No, no, it cannot be,” she muttered; yet, while she spoke, a faint flush passed over her sunken and faded cheek, and the bosom heaved beneath the robe, “a world too wide for its shrunk” proportions. There was a silence, which to her seemed interminable, and she turned away with a deep sigh, and a chill sinking of the heart.

At this time her woman entered with a meaning and flurried look.

“I beg your pardon, my lady—but——”

“But what?”

“Mr Maltravers has called, and asked for your ladyship—so, my lady, Mr Burton sent for me, and I said, My lady is too unwell to see any one; but Mr Maltravers would not be denied, and he is waiting in my lord’s library, and insisted on my coming up and ’nouncing him, my lady.”

Now Mrs Shinfield’s words were not euphonistic, nor her voice mellifluous; but never had eloquence seemed to Florence so effective. Youth, love, beauty, all rushed backed upon her at once, brightening her eyes, her cheek, and filling up ruin with sudden and deceitful light.

“Well,” she said, after a pause, “let Mr Maltravers come up.”

“Come up, my lady? Bless me!—let me just 'range your hair—your ladyship is really in such dish-a-bill.”

“Best as it is, Shinfield—he will excuse all—Go.”

Mrs Shinfield shrugged her shoulders, and departed. A few moments more—a step on the stairs, the creaking of the door—and Maltravers and Florence were again alone. He stood motionless on the threshold. She had involuntarily risen, and so they stood opposite to each other, and the lamp fell full upon her face. Oh, heaven! when did that sight cease to haunt the heart of Maltravers! When shall that altered aspect not pass as a ghost before his eyes!—there it is, faithful and reproachful, alike in solitude and in crowds; it is seen in the glare of noon—it passes dim and wan at night, beneath the stars and the earth—it looked into his heart, and left its likeness there for ever and for ever! Those cheeks, once so beautifully rounded, now sunken into lines and hollows—the livid darkness beneath the eyes—the whitened lip—the sharp, anxious, worn expression, which had replaced that glorious and beaming *regard* from which all the life of genius, all the sweet pride of womanhood, had glowed forth, and in which not only the intelligence, but the eternity of the soul, seemed visibly wrought!

There he stood, aghast and appalled. At length a low groan broke from his lips—he rushed forward, sank on his knees beside her, and, clasping both her hands, sobbed aloud as he covered them with kisses. All the iron of his strong nature was broken down, and his

emotions, long silenced, and now uncontrollable and resistless, were something terrible to behold !

“Do not—do not weep so,” murmured Lady Florence, frightened by his vehemence ; “I’m sadly changed, but the fault is mine—Ernest, it is mine. Best, kindest, gentlest, how could I have been so mad !—and you forgive me? I am yours again—a little while yours. Ah, do not grieve while I am so blessed !”

As she spoke, her tears—tears from a source how different from that whence broke the scorching and intolerable agony of his own !—fell soft upon his bended head, and the hands that still convulsively strained hers. Maltravers looked wildly up into her countenance, and shuddered as he saw her attempt to smile. He rose abruptly, threw himself into a chair, and covered his face. He was seeking by a violent effort to master himself, and it was only by the heaving of his chest, and now and then a gasp as for breath, that he betrayed the stormy struggle within.

Florence gazed at him a moment in bitter, in almost selfish penitence. “And this was the man who seemed to me so callous to the softer sympathies—this was the heart I trampled upon—this the nature I distrusted !”

She came near him, trembling, and with feeble steps—she laid her hand upon his shoulder, and the fondness of love came over her, and she wound her arms around him.

“It is our fate—it is my fate,” said Maltravers at last, awaking as from a hideous dream, and in a hollow but calm voice—“we are the things of destiny, and

the wheel has crushed us. It is an awful state of being, this human life! What is wisdom—virtue—faith to men—piety to Heaven—all the nurture we bestow on ourselves—all our desire to win a loftier sphere, when we are thus the tools of the merest chance—the victims of the pettiest villany; and our very existence—our very senses almost—at the mercy of every traitor and every fool?”

There was something in Ernest's voice, as well as in his reflections, which appeared so unnaturally calm and deep that it startled Florence with a fear more acute than his previous violence had done. He rose, and, muttering to himself, walked to and fro, as if insensible of her presence—in fact, he was so. At length he stopped short, and, fixing his eyes upon Lady Florence, said, in a whispered and thrilling tone—

“Now, then, the name of our undoer?”

“No, Ernest, no—never, unless you promise me to forego the purpose which I read in your eyes. He has confessed—he is penitent: I have forgiven him—you will do so too!”

“His name!” repeated Maltravers, and his face, before very flushed, was unnaturally pale.

“Forgive him—promise me.”

“His name, I say—his name?”

“Is this kind?—you terrify me—you will kill me!” faltered out Florence, and she sank on the sofa exhausted: her nerves, now so weakened, were perfectly unstrung by his vehemence, and she wrung her hands and wept piteously.

“You will not tell me his name?” said Maltravers, softly. “Be it so. I will ask no more. I can discover it myself. Fate the Avenger will reveal it.”

At that thought he grew more composed; and as Florence wept on, the unnatural concentration and fierceness of his mind again gave way, and, seating himself beside her, he uttered all that could soothe, and comfort, and console. And Florence *was* soon soothed! And there, while over their heads the grim skeleton was holding the funeral-pall, they again exchanged their vows, and again, with feelings fonder than of old, spoke of love.

CHAPTER V.

Erichtho, then,
Breathes her dire murmurs, which enforce him bear
Her baneful secrets to the spirits of horror.—MARLOW.

WITH a heavy step Maltravers ascended the stairs of his lonely house that night, and heavily, with a suppressed groan, did he sink upon the first chair that proffered rest.

It was intensely cold. During his long interview with Lady Florence, his servant had taken the precaution to go to Seamore Place, and make some hasty preparations for the owner's return. But the bedroom looked comfortless and bare, the curtains were taken down, the carpets were taken up (a single man's house-keeper is wonderfully provident in these matters: the moment his back is turned, she bustles, she displaces, she exults; "things can be put a little to rights!") Even the fire would not burn clear, but gleamed sullen and fitful from the smothering fuel. It was a large chamber, and the lights imperfectly filled it. On the table lay parliamentary papers, and pamphlets, and bills, and presentation-books from younger authors—evidences of the teeming business of that restless machine, the world. But of all this Maltravers was not sensible:

the winter frost numbed not his feverish veins. His servant, who loved him, as all who saw much of Maltravers did, fidgeted anxiously about the room and plied the sullen fire, and laid out the comfortable dressing-robe, and placed wine on the table, and asked questions which were not answered, and pressed service which was not heeded. The little wheels of life go on, even when the great wheel is paralysed or broken. Maltravers was, if I may so express it, in a kind of mental trance. His emotions had left him thoroughly exhausted. He felt that torpor which succeeds, and is again the precursor of, great woe. At length he was alone, and the solitude half unconsciously restored him to the sense of his heavy misery. For it may be observed, that when misfortune has stricken us home, the presence of any one seems to interfere between the memory and the heart. Withdraw the intruder, and the lifted hammer falls at once upon the anvil! He rose as the door closed on his attendant—rose with a start, and pushed the hat from his gathered brows. He walked for some moments to and fro, and the air of the room, freezing as it was, oppressed him.

There are times when the arrow quivers within us—in which all space seems too confined. Like the wounded hart, we could fly on for ever; there is a vague desire of escape—a yearning, almost insane, to get out from our own selves: the soul struggles to flee away, and take the wings of the morning.

Impatiently, at last, did Maltravers throw open his window it communicated upon a balcony, built out

to command the wide view which, from a certain height, that part of the park affords. He stepped into the balcony and bared his breast to the keen air. The uncomfortable and icy heavens looked down upon the hoar-rime that gathered over the grass, and the ghostly boughs of the deathlike trees. All things in the world without brought the thought of the grave, and the pause of being, and the withering-up of beauty, closer and closer to his soul. In the palpable and gripping winter, death itself seemed to wind around him its skeleton and joyless arms. And as thus he stood, and, wearied with contending against, passively yielded to the bitter passions that wrung and gnawed his heart,—he heard not a sound at the door below—nor the footsteps on the stairs—nor knew he that a visitor was in his room—till he felt a hand upon his shoulder, and, turning round, he beheld the white and livid countenance of Castruccio Cesarini.

“It is a dreary night and a solemn hour, Maltravers,” said the Italian, with a distorted smile—“a fitting night and time for my interview with you.”

“Away!” said Maltravers, in an impatient tone. “I am not at leisure for these mock heroics.”

“Ay, but you shall hear me to the end. I have watched your arrival—I have counted the hours in which you remained with her—I have followed you home. If you have human passions, humanity itself must be dried up within you, and the wild beast in his cavern is not more fearful to encounter. Thus, then, I seek and brave you. Be still. Has Florence

revealed to you the name of him who belied you, and who betrayed herself to the death?"

"Ha!" said Maltravers, growing very pale, and fixing his eyes on Cesarini, "you are not the man—my suspicions lighted elsewhere."

"I am the man. Do thy worst."

Scarce were words uttered, when, with a fierce cry, Maltravers threw himself on the Italian;—he tore him from his footing—he grasped him in his arms as a child—he literally whirled him around and on high; and in that maddening paroxysm it was, perhaps, but the balance of a feather, in the conflicting elements of revenge and reason, which withheld Maltravers from hurling the criminal from the fearful height on which they stood. The temptation passed—Cesarini leaned, safe, unharmed, but half senseless with mingled rage and fear, against the wall.

He was alone—Maltravers had left him—had fled from himself—fled into the chamber—fled for refuge from human passions—to the wing of the All-Seeing and All-Present. "Father," he groaned, sinking on his knees, "support me, save me: without Thee I am lost!"

Slowly Cesarini recovered himself, and re-entered the apartment. A string in his brain was already loosened, and, sullen and ferocious, he returned again to goad the lion that had spared him. Maltravers had already risen from his brief prayer. With locked and rigid countenance, with arms folded on his breast, he stood confronting the Italian, who advanced to-

wards him with a menacing brow and arm, but halted involuntarily at the sight of that commanding aspect.

“Well, then,” said Maltravers at last, with a tone preternaturally calm and low, “you then are the man. Speak on—what arts did you employ?”

“Your own letter! When, many months ago, I wrote to tell you of the hopes it was mine to conceive, and to ask your opinion of her I loved, how did you answer me? With doubts, with depreciation, with covert and polished scorn, of the very woman, whom, with a deliberate treachery, you afterwards wrested from my worshipping and adoring love. That letter I garbled—I made the doubts you expressed of my happiness seem doubts of your own. I changed the dates—I made the letter itself appear written, not on your first acquaintance with her, but subsequent to your plighted and accepted vows. Your own handwriting convicted you of mean suspicion and of sordid motives. These were my arts.”

“They were most noble. Do you abide by them—or repent?”

“For what I have done to *thee* I have no repentance. Nay, I regard thee still as the aggressor. Thou hast robbed me of her who was all the world to me—and, be thine excuses what they may, I hate thee with a hate that cannot slumber—that abjures the abject name of remorse! I exult in the very agonies thou endurest. But for her—the stricken—the dying! O God, O God! The blow falls upon mine own head!”

“Dying!” said Maltravers, slowly and with a shud-

der. "No, no—not dying—or what art thou? Her murderer? And what must I be? Her avenger!"

Overpowered with his own passions, Cesarini sank down, and covered his face with his clasped hands. Maltravers stalked gloomily to and fro the apartment. There was silence for some moments.

At length Maltravers paused opposite Cesarini, and thus addressed him :—

"You have come hither, not so much to confess the basest crime of which man can be guilty, as to gloat over my anguish, and to brave me to revenge my wrongs. Go, man, go—for the present you are safe. While she lives, my life is not mine to hazard—if she recover, I can pity you and forgive. To me your offence, foul though it be, sinks below contempt itself. It is the consequences of that crime as they relate to—that noble and suffering woman, which can alone raise the despicable into the tragic, and make your life a worthy and a necessary offering—not to revenge, but justice :—life for life—victim for victim ! 'Tis the old law—'tis a righteous one."

"You shall not, with your accursed coldness, thus dispose of me as you will, and arrogate the option to smite or save ! No," continued Cesarini, stamping his foot—"no ; far from seeking forbearance at your hands—I dare and defy you ! You think I have injured you—I, on the other hand, consider that the wrong has come from yourself. But for you, she might have loved me—have been mine. Let that pass. But for you, at least, it is certain that I should neither have sullied

my soul with a vile sin, nor brought the brightest of human beings to the grave. If she dies, the murder may be mine, but you were the cause—the devil that tempted to the offence. I defy and spit upon you—I have no softness left in me—my veins are fire—my heart thirsts for blood. You—you—have still the privilege to see—to bless—to tend her: and I—I, who loved her so—who could have kissed the earth she trod on—I—well, well, no matter—I hate you—I insult you—I call you villain and dastard—I throw myself on the laws of honour, and I demand that conflict you defer or deny!”

“Home, doter—home—fall on thy knees, and pray to Heaven for pardon—make up thy dread account—repine not at the days yet thine to wash the black spot from thy soul. For, while I speak, I foresee too well that her days are numbered, and with her thread of life is entwined thine own. Within twelve hours from her last moment we shall meet again: but now I am as ice and stone—thou canst not move me. Her closing life shall not be darkened by the aspect of blood—by the thought of the sacrifice it demands. Begone, or menials shall cast thee from my door: those lips are too base to breathe the same air as honest men. Begone, I say, begone!”

Though scarce a muscle moved in the lofty countenance of Maltravers—though no frown darkened the majestic brow—though no fire broke from the steadfast and scornful eye—there was a kingly authority in the aspect, in the extended arm, the stately crest, and a

power in the swell of the stern voice, which awed and quelled the unhappy being whose own passions exhausted and unmanned him. He strove to fling back scorn to scorn, but his lips trembled and his voice died in hollow murmurs within his breast. Maltravers regarded him with a crushing and intense disdain. The Italian with shame and wrath wrestled against himself, but in vain : the cold eye that was fixed upon him was as a spell, which the fiend within him could not rebel against or resist. Mechanically he moved to the door, then turning round, he shook his clenched hand at Maltravers, and with a wild, maniacal laugh, rushed from the apartment.

CHAPTER VI.

On some fond breast the parting soul relies.—GRAY.

NOT a day passed in which Maltravers was absent from the side of Florence. He came early, he went late. He subsided into his former character of an accepted suitor, without a word of explanation with Lord Saxingham. That task was left to Florence. She doubtless performed it well, for his lordship seemed satisfied, though grave, and, almost for the first time in his life, sad. Maltravers never reverted to the cause of their unhappy dissension. Nor from that night did he once give way to whatever might be his more agonised and fierce emotions—he never affected to reproach himself—he never bewailed with a vain despair their approaching separation. Whatever it cost him, he stood collected and stoical in the intense power of his self-control. He had but one object, one desire, one hope—to save the last hours of Florence Lascelles from every pang—to brighten and smooth the passage across the Solemn Bridge. His forethought, his presence of mind, his care, his tenderness, never forsook him for an instant; they went beyond the attributes of men, they went into all the fine, the indescribable minutiae by

which woman makes herself, "in pain and anguish," the "ministering angel." It was as if he had nerved and braced his whole nature to one duty—as if that duty were more felt than affection itself—as if he were resolved that Florence should not remember that *she had no mother!*

And oh, then, how Florence loved him! how far more luxurious in its grateful and clinging fondness, was that love, than the wild and jealous fire of their earlier connection! Her own character, as is often the case in lingering illness, became incalculably more gentle and softened down, as the shadows closed around it. She loved to make him read and talk to her—and her ancient poetry of thought now grew mellowed, as it were, into religion, which is indeed poetry with a stronger wing. . . . There was a world beyond the grave—there was life out of the chrysalis sleep of death—they would yet be united. And Maltravers, who was a solemn and intense believer in the GREAT HOPE, did not neglect the purest and highest of all the fountains of solace.

Often in that quiet room, in that gorgeous mansion, which had been the scene of all vain or worldly schemes—of flirtations and feastings, and political meetings and cabinet dinners, and all the bubbles of the passing wave—often there did these persons, whose position to each other had been so suddenly and so strangely changed, converse on those matters—daring and divine—which "make the bridal of the earth and sky."

"How fortunate am I," said Florence, one day, "that

my choice fell on one who thinks as you do ! How your words elevate and exalt me !—yet once I never dreamt of asking your creed on these questions. It is in sorrow or sickness that we learn why Faith was given as a soother to man—Faith, which is Hope with a holier name—hope that knows neither deceit nor death. Ah, how wisely do you speak of the *philosophy* of belief ! It is, indeed, the telescope through which the stars grow large upon our gaze. And to you, Ernest, my beloved—comprehended and known at last—to you I leave, when I am gone, that monitor—that friend ;—you will know yourself what you teach to me. And when you look not on the heaven alone, but in all space—on all the illimitable creation—you will know that I am there ! For the home of a spirit is wherever spreads the Universal Presence of God. And to what numerous stages of being, what paths, what duties, what active and glorious tasks in other worlds, may we not be reserved—perhaps to know and share them together, and mount age after age higher in the scale of being. For surely in heaven there is no pause or torpor—we do not lie down in calm and unimprovable repose. Movement and progress will remain the law and condition of existence. And there will be efforts and duties for us above, as there have been below.”

It was in this theory, which Maltravers shared, that the character of Florence, her overflowing life and activity of thought—her aspirations, her ambition—were still displayed. It was not so much to the calm and rest of the grave that she extended her unreluctant gaze,

as to the light and glory of a renewed and progressive existence.

It was while thus they sat, the low voice of Ernest, tranquil yet half trembling with the emotions he sought to restrain—sometimes sobering, sometimes yet more elevating, the thoughts of Florence—that Lord Vargrave was announced ; and Lumley Ferrers, who had now succeeded to that title, entered the room. It was the first time that Florence had seen him since the death of his uncle—the first time Maltravers had seen him since the evening so fatal to Florence. Both started—Maltravers rose and walked to the window. Lord Vargrave took the hand of his cousin and pressed it to his lips in silence, while his lips betokened feelings that for once were genuine.

“ You see, Lumley, I am resigned,” said Florence, with a sweet smile. “ I am resigned and happy.”

Lumley glanced at Maltravers, and met a cold, scrutinising, piercing eye, from which he shrank with some confusion. He recovered himself in an instant.

“ I am rejoiced, my cousin—I *am* rejoiced,” said he, very earnestly, “ to see Maltravers here again. Let us now hope the best.”

Maltravers walked deliberately up to Lumley. “ Will you take my hand *now*, too?” said he, with deep meaning in his tone.

“ More willingly than ever,” said Lumley ; and he did not shrink as he said it.

“ I am satisfied,” replied Maltravers, after a pause, and in a voice that expressed more than his words.

There is in some natures so great a hoard of generosity that it often dulls their acuteness. Maltravers could not believe that frankness could be wholly a mask—it was a hypocrisy he knew not of. He himself was not incapable, had circumstances so urged him, of great crimes; nay, the design of one crime lay at that moment deadly and dark within his heart, for he had some passions which in so resolute a character could produce, should the wind waken them into storm, dire and terrible effects. Even at the age of thirty, it was yet uncertain whether Ernest Maltravers might become an exemplary or an evil man. But he could sooner have strangled a foe than taken the hand of a man whom he had once betrayed.

“I love to think you friends,” said Florence, gazing at them affectionately; “and to you, at least, Lumley, such friendship should be a blessing. I always loved you much and dearly, Lumley—loved you as a brother, though our characters often jarred.”

Lumley winced. “For Heaven’s sake,” he cried, “do not speak thus tenderly to me—I cannot bear it, and look on you and think——”

“That I am dying. Kind words become us best, when our words are approaching to the last. But enough of this—I grieved for your loss.”

“My poor uncle!” said Lumley, eagerly changing the conversation—“the shock was sudden; and melancholy duties have absorbed me so till this day, that I could not come even to you. It soothed me, however,

to learn, in answer to my daily inquiries, that Ernest was here. For my part," he added, with a faint smile, "I have had duties as well as honours devolved on me. I am left guardian to an heiress, and betrothed to a child."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, my poor uncle was so fondly attached to his wife's daughter, that he has left her the bulk of his property: a very small estate—not £2000 a-year—goes with the title (a new title too, which requires twice as much to carry it off and make its pinchbeck pass for gold). In order, however, to serve a double purpose—secure to his *protégée* his own beloved peerage, and atone to his nephew for the loss of wealth—he has left it a last request, that I should marry the young lady over whom I am appointed guardian, when she is eighteen—alas! I shall then be at the other side of forty! If she does not take to so mature a bridegroom, she loses thirty—only thirty of the £200,000 settled upon her, which goes to me as a sugar-plum after the nauseous draught of the young lady's 'No.' Now, you know all. His widow, really an exemplary young woman, has a jointure of £1500 a-year, and the villa. It is not much, but she is contented."

The lightness of the new peer's tone revolted Maltravers, and he turned impatiently away. But Lord Vargrave, resolving not to suffer the conversation to glide back to sorrowful subjects, which he always hated, turned round to Ernest, and said, "Well, my dear Ernest, I see by the papers that you are to have

N——'s late appointment—it is a very rising office. I congratulate you.”

“I have refused,” said Maltravers, dryly.

“Bless me !—indeed !—why ?”

Ernest bit his lip, and frowned ; but his glance wandering unconsciously at Florence, Lumley thought he detected the true reply to his question, and became mute.

The conversation was afterwards embarrassed and broken up ; Lumley went away as soon as he could, and Lady Florence that night had a severe fit, and could not leave her bed the next day. That confinement she had struggled against to the last ; and now, day by day, it grew more frequent and inevitable. The steps of death became accelerated. And Lord Saxingham, wakened at last to the mournful truth, took his place by his daughter's side, and forgot that he was a cabinet minister.

CHAPTER VII.

Away, my friends, why take such pains to know
What some brave marble soon in church shall show?—CRABBE.

It may seem strange, but Maltravers had never loved Lady Florence as he did now. Was it the perversity of human nature, that makes the things of mortality dearer to us in proportion as they fade from our hopes, like birds whose hues are only unfolded when they take wing and vanish amidst the skies; or was it that he had ever doted more on loveliness of mind than that of form, and the first bloomed out the more, the more the last decayed? A thing to protect, to soothe, to shelter—oh, how dear it is to the pride of man! The haughty woman who can stand alone and requires no leaning-place in our heart, loses the spell of her sex.

I pass over those stages of decline gratuitously painful to record; and which, in this case, mine cannot be the cold and technical hand to trace. At length came that time when physicians could define within a few days the final hour of release. And latterly the mocking pruderies of rank had been laid aside, and Maltravers had, for some hours at least in the day, taken

his watch beside the couch to which the admired and brilliant Florence Lascelles was now almost constantly reduced. But her high and heroic spirit was with her to the last. To the last she could endure love, and hope. One day, when Maltravers left his post, she besought him, with more solemnity than usual, to return that evening. She fixed the precise hour, and she sighed heavily when he departed. Maltravers paused in the hall to speak to the physician, who was just quitting Lord Saxingham's library. Ernest spoke to him for some moments calmly, and when he heard the fiat, he betrayed no other emotion than a slight quiver of the lip! "I must not weep for her yet," he muttered, as he turned from the door. He went thence to the house of a gentleman of his own age, with whom he had formed that kind of acquaintance which never amounts to familiar friendship, but rests upon mutual respect, and is often more ready than professed friendship itself to confer mutual service. Colonel Danvers was a man who usually sat next to Maltravers in parliament; they voted together, and thought alike on principles both of politics and honour: they would have lent thousands to each other without bond or memorandum; and neither ever wanted a warm and indignant advocate when he was abused behind his back in the presence of the other. Yet their tastes and ordinary habits were not congenial; and when they met in the streets, they never said, as they would to companions they esteemed less, "Let us spend the day together!" Such forms of acquaintance are not

uncommon among honourable men who have already formed habits and pursuits of their own, which they cannot surrender even to friendship. Colonel Danvers was not at home—they believed he was at his club, of which Ernest also was a member. Thither Maltravers bent his way. On arriving, he found that Danvers had been at the club an hour ago, and left word that he should shortly return. Maltravers entered and quietly sat down. The room was full of its daily loungers ; but he did not shrink from, he did not even heed the crowd. He felt not the desire of solitude—there was solitude enough within him. Several distinguished public men were there, grouped around the fire, and many of the hangers-on and satellites of political life ; they were talking with eagerness and animation, for it was a season of great party-conflict. Strange as it may seem, though Maltravers was then scarcely sensible of their conversation, it all came back vividly and faithfully on him afterwards, in the first hours of reflection on his own future plans, and served to deepen and consolidate his disgust of the world. They were discussing the character of a great statesman whom, warmed but by the loftiest and purest motives, they were unable to understand. Their gross suspicions, their coarse jealousies, their calculations of patriotism by place, all that strips the varnish from the face of that fair harlot—Political Ambition—sank like caustic into his spirit. A gentleman, seeing him sit silent, with his hat over his moody brows, civilly extended to him the paper he was reading.

“It is the second edition ; you will find the last French express.”

“Thank you,” said Maltravers ; and the civil man started as he heard the brief answer ; there was something so inexpressibly prostrate and broken-spirited in the voice that uttered it.

Maltravers’s eyes fell mechanically on the columns, and caught his own name. That work which, in the fair retirement of Temple Grove, it had so pleased him to compose—in every page and every thought of which Florence had been consulted—which was so inseparably associated with her image, and glorified by the light of her kindred genius—was just published. It had been completed long since ; but the publisher had, for some excellent reason of the craft, hitherto delayed its appearance. Maltravers knew nothing of its publication ; he had meant, after his return to town, to have sent to forbid its appearance ; but his thoughts of late had crushed everything else out of his memory—he had forgotten its existence. And now, in all the pomp and parade of authorship, it was sent into the world ! *Now, now*, when it was like an indecent mockery of the Bed of Death—a sacrilege, an impiety ! There is a terrible disconnection between the author and the man—the author’s life and the man’s life : the eras of visible triumph may be those of the most intolerable, though unrevealed and un conjectured anguish. The book that delighted us to compose may first appear in the hour when all things under the sun are joyless. This had been Ernest Maltravers’s most favoured work. It had

been conceived in a happy hour of great ambition—it had been executed with that desire of truth which, in the mind of genius, becomes ART. How little, in the solitary hours stolen from sleep, had he thought of self, and that labourer's hire called "fame!" how had he dreamt that he was promulgating secrets to make his kind better, and wiser, and truer to the great aims of life! How had Florence, and Florence alone, understood the beatings of his heart in every page! *And now!*—it so chanced that the work was reviewed in the paper he read—it was not only a hostile criticism, it was a personally abusive diatribe, a virulent invective. All the motives that can darken or defile were ascribed to him. All the mean spite of some mean mind was sputtered forth. Had the writer known the awful blow that awaited Maltravers at that time, it is not in man's nature but that he would have shrunk from this petty gall upon the wrung withers; but, as I have said, there is a terrible disconnection between the author and the man. The first is always at our mercy—of the last we know nothing. At such an hour Maltravers could feel none of the contempt that proud, none of the wrath that vain, minds feel at these stings. He could feel nothing but an undefined abhorrence of the world, and of the aims and objects he had pursued so long. Yet that even he did not *then* feel. He was in a dream; but as men remember dreams, so when he awoke did he loathe his own former aspirations, and sicken at their base rewards. It was the first time, since his first year of inexperienced authorship, that

abuse had had the power even to vex him for a moment. But here, when the cup was already full, was the drop that overflowed. The great column of his past world was gone, and all else seemed crumbling away.

At length Colonel Danvers entered. Maltravers drew him aside, and they left the club.

“Danvers,” said the latter, “the time in which I told you I should need your services is near at hand ; let me see you, if possible, to-night.”

“Certainly—I shall be at the House till eleven. After that hour you will find me at home.”

“I thank you.”

“Cannot this matter be arranged amicably?”

“No, it is a quarrel of life and death.”

“Yet the world is really growing too enlightened for these old mimicries of single combat.”

“There are some cases in which human nature and its deep wrongs will be ever stronger than the world and its philosophy. Duels and wars belong to the same principle ; both are sinful on light grounds and poor pretexts. But it is not sinful for a soldier to defend his country from invasion ; nor for man, with a man’s heart, to vindicate truth and honour with his life. The robber that asks me for money I am allowed to shoot. Is the robber that tears from me treasures never to be replaced, to go free? These are the inconsistencies of a pseudo-ethics, which, as long as we are made of flesh and blood, we can never subscribe to.”

“Yet the ancients,” said Danvers, with a smile,

“were as passionate as ourselves, and they dispensed with duels.”

“Yes, because they resorted to assassination!” answered Maltravers, with a gloomy frown. “As in revolutions all law is suspended, so are there stormy events and mighty injuries in life which are as revolutions to individuals. Enough of this—it is no time to argue like the schoolmen. When we meet you shall know all, and you will judge like me. Good-day!”

“What! are you going already? Maltravers, you look ill, your hand is feverish—you should take advice.”

Maltravers smiled—but the smile was not like his own—shook his head, and strode rapidly away.

Three of the London clocks, one after the other, had told the hour of nine, as a tall and commanding figure passed up the street towards Saxingham House. Five doors before you reach that mansion there is a crossing, and at this spot stood a young man, in whose face youth itself looked sapless and blasted. It was then March—the third of March; the weather was unusually severe and biting, even for that angry month. There had been snow in the morning, and it lay white and dreary in various ridges along the street. But the wind was not still in the keen but quiet sharpness of frost; on the contrary, it howled almost like a hurricane through the desolate thoroughfares, and the lamps flickered unsteadily in the turbulent gusts. Perhaps it was these blasts which increased the haggardness of aspect in the young man I have mentioned. His hair, which was much longer than is commonly worn, was

tossed wildly from cheeks preternaturally shrunken, hollow, and livid: and the frail thin form seemed scarcely able to support itself against the rush of the winds.

As the tall figure, which, in its masculine stature and proportions, and a peculiar and nameless grandeur of bearing, strongly contrasted that of the younger man, now came to the spot where the streets met, it paused abruptly.

“You are here once more, Castruccio Cesarini; it is well!” said the low but ringing voice of Ernest Maltravers. “This, I believe, will not be our last interview to-night.”

“I ask you, sir,” said Cesarini, in a tone in which pride struggled with emotion—“I ask you to tell me how she is; whether you know—I cannot speak——”

“Your work is nearly done,” answered Maltravers. “A few hours more, and your victim, for she is yours, will bear her tale to the Great Judgment-Seat. Murderer as you are, tremble, for your own hour approaches!”

“She dies, and I cannot see her! and you are permitted that last glimpse of human perfectness; *you* who never loved her as I did; you—hated and detested! you——”

Cesarini paused, and his voice died away, choked in his own convulsive gaspings for breath.

Maltravers looked at him from the height of his erect and lofty form with a merciless eye, for in this one quarter Maltravers had shut out pity from his soul.

“Weak criminal !” said he, “hear me. You received at my hands forbearance, friendship, fostering and anxious care. When your own follies plunged you into penury, mine was the unseen hand that plucked you from famine, or the prison. I strove to redeem, and save, and raise you, and endow your miserable spirit with the thirst and the power of honour and independence. The agent of that wish was Florence Lascelles ; you repaid us well ! a base and fraudulent forgery, attaching meanness to me, fraught with agony and death to her. Your conscience at last smote you ; you revealed to her your crime—one spark of manhood made you reveal it also to myself. Fresh as I was, in that moment, from the contemplation of the ruin you had made, I curbed the impulse that would have crushed the life from your bosom. I told you to live on while life was left to *her*. If she recovered, I could forgive ; if she died, I must avenge. We entered into that solemn compact, and in a few hours the bond will need the seal : it is the blood of one of us. Castruccio Cesarini, there is justice in heaven. Deceive yourself not ; you will fall by my hand. When the hour comes, you will hear from me. Let me pass—I have no more now to say.”

Every syllable of this speech was uttered with that thrilling distinctness which seems as if the depth of the heart spoke in the voice. But Cesarini did not appear to understand its import. He seized Maltravers by the arm, and looked in his face with a wild and menacing glare.

“Did you tell me she was dying?” he said. “I ask you that question: why do you not answer me? Oh, by the way, you threaten me with your vengeance. Know you not that I long to meet you front to front, and to the death? Did I not tell you so—did I not try to move your slow blood—to insult you into a conflict in which I should have gloried? Yet then you were marble.”

“Because *my* wrong I could forgive, and *hers*—there was then a hope that *hers* might not need the atonement. Away!”

Maltravers shook the hold of the Italian from his arm, and passed on. A wild sharp yell of despair rang after him, and echoed in his ear as he strode the long, dim, solitary stairs that led to the deathbed of Florence Lascelles.

Maltravers entered the room adjoining that which contained the sufferer—the same room, still gay and cheerful, in which had been his first interview with Florence since their reconciliation.

Here he found the physician dozing in a fauteuil. Lady Florence had fallen asleep during the last two or three hours. Lord Saxingham was in his own apartment, deeply and noisily affected; for it was not thought that Florence could survive the night.

Maltravers sat himself quietly down. Before him, on a table, lay several manuscript books, gaily and gorgeously bound; he mechanically opened them. Florence’s fair, noble, Italian characters met his eye in every page. Her rich and active mind, her love for

poetry, her thirst for knowledge, her indulgence of deep thought, spoke from those pages like the ghosts of herself. Often, underscored with the marks of her approbation, he chanced upon extracts from his own works, sometimes upon reflections by the writer herself, not inferior in truth and depth to his own : snatches of wild verse never completed, but of a power and energy beyond the delicate grace of lady-poets ; brief, vigorous criticisms on books, above the common holiday studies of the sex ; indignant and sarcastic aphorisms on the real world, with high and sad bursts of feeling upon the ideal one ; all checkering and enriching the varied volumes, told of the rare gifts with which this singular girl was endowed—a herbal, as it were, of withered blossoms that might have borne Hesperian fruits. And sometimes in these outpourings of the full mind and laden heart were allusions to himself, so tender and so touching—the pencilled outline of his features, traced by memory in a thousand aspects—the reference to former interviews and conversations—the dates and hours marked with a woman’s minute and treasuring care !—all these tokens of genius and of love spoke to him with a voice that said, “ And this creature is lost to you for ever : you never appreciated her till the time for her departure was irrevocably fixed ! ”

Maltravers uttered a deep groan ; all the past rushed over him. Her romantic passion for one yet unknown—her interest in his glory—her zeal for his life of life, his spotless and haughty name. It was as if with her Fame and Ambition were dying also, and henceforth

nothing but common clay and sordid motives were to be left on earth.

How sudden—how awfully sudden had been the blow! True, there had been an absence of some months in which the change had operated. But absence is a blank, a nonentity. He had left her in apparent health, in the tide of prosperity and pride. He saw her again—stricken down in body and temper—chastened—humbled—dying. And this being, so bright and lofty, how had she loved him! Never had he been so loved, except in that morning dream, haunted by the vision of the lost and dim-remembered Alice. Never on earth could he be so loved again. The air and aspect of the whole chamber grew to him painful and oppressive. It was full of her—the owner! There the harp, which so well became her muse-like form that it was associated with her like a part of herself! There the pictures, fresh and glowing from her hand,—the grace—the harmony—the classic and simple taste everywhere displayed!

Rousseau has left to us an immortal portrait of the lover waiting for the first embraces of his mistress. But to wait with a pulse as feverish, a brain as dizzy, for her last look—to await the moment of despair, not rapture—to feel the slow and dull time as palpable a load upon the heart, yet to shrink from your own impatience, and wish that the agony of suspense might endure for ever—this, oh, this is a picture of intense passion—of flesh-and-blood reality—of the rare and solemn epochs of our mysterious life—which had

been worthier the genius of that "Apostle of Affliction!"

At length the door opened; the favourite attendant of Florence looked in.

"Is Mr Maltravers there? Oh, sir, my lady is awake, and would see you."

Maltravers rose, but his feet were glued to the ground, his sinking heart stood still — it was a mortal terror that possessed him. With a deep sigh he shook off the numbing spell, and passed to the bedside of Florence.

She sat up, propped by pillows, and as he sank beside her, and clasped her wan transparent hand, she looked at him with a smile of pitying love.

"You have been very, very kind to me," she said, after a pause, and with a voice which had altered even since the last time he heard it. "You have made that part of life from which human nature shrinks with dread, the happiest and the brightest of all my short and vain existence. My own dear Ernest—Heaven reward you!"

A few grateful tears dropped from her eyes, and they fell on the hand which she bent her lips to kiss.

"It was not here—not amidst streets and the noisy abodes of anxious, worldly men—nor was it in this harsh and dreary season of the year, that I could have wished to look my last on earth. Could I have seen the face of Nature—could I have watched once more with the summer sun amidst those gentle scenes we loved so well—Death would have had no difference

from sleep. But what matters it? With you there are summer and Nature everywhere."

Maltravers raised his face, and their eyes met in silence—it was a long, fixed gaze, which spoke more than all words could. Her head dropped on his shoulder, and there it lay, passive and motionless, for some moments. A soft step glided into the room—it was the unhappy father's. He came to the other side of his daughter, and sobbed convulsively.

She then raised herself, and even in the shades of death, a faint blush passed over her cheek.

"My good, dear father, what comfort will it give you hereafter to think how fondly you spoiled your Florence!"

Lord Saxingham could not answer: he clasped her in his arms and wept over her. Then he broke away—looked on her with a shudder.

"O God!" he cried, "she is dead—she is dead!"

Maltravers started. The physician kindly approached, and, taking Lord Saxingham's hand, led him from the room—he went mute and obedient like a child.

But the struggle was not yet past. Florence once more opened her eyes, and Maltravers uttered a cry of joy. But along those eyes the film was darkening rapidly, as still through the mist and shadow they sought the beloved countenance which hung over her, as if to breathe life into waning life. Twice her lips moved, but her voice failed her; she shook her head sadly.

Maltravers hastily held to her mouth a cordial which lay ready on the table near her, but scarce had it moistened her lips, when her whole frame grew heavier and heavier in his clasp. Her head once more sank upon his bosom—she thrice gasped wildly for breath—and at length, raising her hand on high, life struggled into its expiring ray.

“*There*—above!—Ernest—that name—Ernest!”

Yes, that name was the last she uttered; she was evidently conscious of that thought, for a smile, as her voice again faltered—a smile sweet and serene—that smile never seen but on the faces of the dying and the dead—borrowed from a light that is not of this world—settled slowly on her brow, her lips, her whole countenance; still she breathed, but the breath grew fainter; at length, without murmur, sound, or struggle, it passed away—the head drooped from his bosom—the form fell from his arms—all was over!

CHAPTER VIII.

Is this the promised end?—*Lear*.

IT was two hours after that scene before Maltravers left the house. It was then just on the stroke of the first hour of morning. To him, while he walked through the streets, and the sharp winds howled on his path, it was as if a strange and wizard life had passed into and supported him—a sort of drowsy, dull existence. He was like a sleep-walker, unconscious of all around him; yet his steps went safe and free; and the one thought that possessed his being—into which all intellect seemed shrunk—the thought—not fiery nor vehement, but calm, stern, and solemn—the thought of revenge—seemed, as it were, grown his soul itself. He arrived at the door of Colonel Danvers, mounted the stairs, and as his friend advanced to meet him, said calmly, “Now, then, the hour has arrived.”

“But what would you do now?”

“Come with me, and you shall learn.”

“Very well, my carriage is below. Will you direct the servants?”

Maltravers nodded, gave his orders to the careless footman, and the two friends were soon driving through

the less known and courtly regions of the giant city. It was then that Maltravers concisely stated to Danvers the fraud that had been practised by Cesarini.

“You will go with me now,” concluded Maltravers, “to his house. To do him justice, he is no coward; he has not shrunk from giving me his address, nor will he shrink from the atonement I demand. I shall wait below while you arrange our meeting—at daybreak for to-morrow.”

Danvers was astonished, and even appalled by the discovery made to him. There was something so unusual and strange in the whole affair. But neither his experience, nor his principles of honour, could suggest any alternative to the plan proposed. For though not regarding the cause of quarrel in the same light as Maltravers, and putting aside all question as to the right of the latter to constitute himself the champion of the betrothed or the avenger of the dead, it seemed clear to the soldier that a man whose confidential letter had been garbled by another for the purpose of slandering his truth and calumniating his name, had no option but contempt, or the sole retribution (wretched though it be) which the customs of the higher class permit to those who live within its pale. But contempt for a wrong that a sorrow so tragic had followed—was *that* option in human philosophy?

The carriage stopped at a door in a narrow lane in an obscure suburb. Yet, dark as all the houses around were, lights were seen in the upper windows of Cesarini's residence, passing to and fro; and scarce had the

servant's loud knock echoed through the dim thoroughfare ere the door was opened. Danvers descended, and entered the passage—"Oh, sir, I am so glad you are come!" said an old woman, pale and trembling; "he do take on so!"

"There is no mistake?" asked Danvers, halting; "an Italian gentleman named Cesarini lodges here?"

"Yes, sir, poor cretur—I sent for you to come to him—for says I to my boy, says I——"

"Whom do you take me for?"

"Why, la, sir! you be's the doctor, ben't you?"

Danvers made no reply; he had a mean opinion of the courage of one who could act dishonourably; he thought there was some design to cheat his friend out of his revenge; accordingly he ascended the stairs, motioning the woman to precede him.

He came back to the door of the carriage in a few minutes. "Let us go home, Maltravers," said he; "this man is not in a state to meet you."

"Ha!" cried Maltravers, frowning darkly, and all his long-smothered indignation rushing like fire through every vein of his body; "would he shrink from the atonement?" he pushed Danvers impatiently aside, leapt from the carriage, and rushed up-stairs.

Danvers followed.

Heated, wrought-up, furious, Ernest Maltravers burst into a small and squalid chamber; from the closed doors of which, through many chinks, had gleamed the light that told him Cesarini was within. And Cesarini's eyes, blazing with horrible fire, were the first

object that met his gaze. Maltravers stood still, as if frozen into stone.

“Ha! ha!” laughed a shrill and shrieking voice, which contrasted dreadfully with the accents of the soft Tuscan in which the wild words were strung—“who comes here with garments dyed in blood? You cannot accuse me—for *my* blow drew no blood, it went straight to the heart—it tore no flesh by the way; we Italians poison our victims! Where art thou—where art thou, Maltravers? I am ready. Coward, you do not come! Oh, yes, yes, here you are;—the pistols—I will not fight so. I am a wild beast. Let us rend each other with our teeth and talons!”

Huddled up like a heap of confused and jointless limbs in the furthest corner of the room, lay the wretch, a raving maniac;—two men keeping their firm gripe on him, which, ever and anon, with the mighty strength of madness, he shook off, to fall back senseless and exhausted; his strained and bloodshot eyes starting from their sockets, the slaver gathering round his lips, his raven hair standing on end, his delicate and symmetrical features distorted into a hideous and Gorgon aspect. It was, indeed, an appalling and sublime spectacle, full of an awful moral, the meeting of the foes! Here stood Maltravers, strong beyond the common strength of men, in health, power, conscious superiority, premeditated vengeance—wise, gifted; all his faculties ripe, developed, at his command;—the complete and all-armed man, prepared for defence and offence against every foe—a man who, once roused in

a righteous quarrel, would not have quailed before an army ; and there and thus was his dark and fierce purpose dashed from his soul, shivered into atoms at his feet. He felt the nothingness of man and man's wrath—in the presence of the madman on whose head the thunderbolt of a greater curse than human anger ever breathes had fallen. In his horrible affliction the Criminal triumphed over the Avenger !

“ Yes ! yes ! ” shouted Cesarini again ; “ they tell me she is dying : but he is by her side ;—pluck him thence—he shall not touch her hand—she shall not bless him—she is mine—if I killed her, I have saved her from him—she is mine in death. Let me in, I say—I will come in—I will, I will see her, and strangle him at her feet.” With that, by a tremendous effort, he tore himself from the clutch of his holders, and with a sudden and exultant bound sprang across the room, and stood face to face to Maltravers. The proud, brave man turned pale, and recoiled a step—“ It is he ! it is he ! ” shrieked the maniac, and he leaped like a tiger at the throat of his rival. Maltravers quickly seized his arm, and whirled him round. Cesarini fell heavily on the floor, mute, senseless, and in strong convulsions.

“ Mysterious Providence ! ” murmured Maltravers, “ thou hast justly rebuked the mortal for dreaming he might arrogate to himself thy privilege of vengeance. Forgive the sinner, O God, as I do—as thou teachest this stubborn heart to forgive—as she forgave who is now with thee, a blessed saint in heaven ! ”

When, some minutes afterwards, the doctor, who had been sent for, arrived, the head of the stricken patient lay on the lap of his foe, and it was the hand of Maltravers that wiped the froth from the white lips, and the voice of Maltravers that strove to soothe, and the tears of Maltravers that were falling on that fiery brow.

“Tend him, sir, tend him as my brother,” said Maltravers, hiding his face as he resigned the charge. “Let him have all that can alleviate and cure—remove him hence to some fitter abode—send for the best advice. Restore him, and—and——” He could say no more, but left the room abruptly.

It was afterwards ascertained that Cesarini had remained in the streets after his short interview with Ernest; that at length he had knocked at Lord Saxingham’s door just in the very hour when death had claimed its victim. He heard the announcement—he sought to force his way up-stairs—they thrust him from the house, and nothing more of him was known till he arrived at his own door, an hour before Danvers and Maltravers came, in raging frenzy. Perhaps by one of the dim erratic gleams of light which always checker the darkness of insanity, he retained some faint remembrance of his compact and assignation with Maltravers, which had happily guided his steps back to his abode.

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It was two months after this scene, a lovely Sabbath morning, in the earliest May, as Lumley, Lord Var-

grave, sat alone by the window in his late uncle's villa, in his late uncle's easy-chair—his eyes were resting musingly on the green lawn on which the windows opened, or rather on two forms that were seated upon a rustic bench in the middle of the sward. One was the widow in her weeds, the other was that fair and lovely child destined to be the bride of the new lord. The hands of the mother and daughter were clasped each in each. There was sadness in the faces of both—deeper if more resigned on that of the elder, for the child sought to console her parent, and grief in childhood comes with a butterfly's wing.

Lumley gazed on them both, and on the child more earnestly.

“She is very lovely,” he said; “she will be very rich. After all, I am not to be pitied. I am a peer, and I have enough to live upon at present. I am a rising man—our party want peers; and though I could not have had more than a subaltern's seat at the Treasury Board six months ago, when I was an active, zealous, able commoner, now that I am a lord, with what they call a stake in the country, I may open my mouth and—bless me! I know not how many wind-falls may drop in! My uncle was wiser than I thought in wrestling for this peerage, which he won and I wear!—Then, by-and-by, just at the age when I want to marry and have an heir (and a pretty wife saves one a vast deal of trouble), £200,000 and a young beauty! Come, come, I have strong cards in my hands if I play them tolerably. I must take care that she falls des-

perately in love with me. Leave me alone for that—I know the sex, and have never failed except in — ah, that poor Florence! Well, it is no use regretting! Like thrifty artists, we must paint out the unmarketable picture, and call luckier creations to fill up the same canvass!”

Here the servant interrupted Lord Vargrave’s meditation by bringing in the letters and the newspapers which had just been forwarded from his town-house. Lord Vargrave had spoken in the Lords on the previous Friday, and he wished to see what the Sunday newspapers said of his speech. So he took up one of the leading papers before he opened the letters. His eyes rested upon two paragraphs in close neighbourhood with each other: the first ran thus:—

“The celebrated Mr Maltravers has abruptly resigned his seat for the — of —, and left town yesterday on an extended tour on the Continent. Speculation is busy on the causes of the singular and unexpected self-exile of a gentleman so distinguished—in the very zenith of his career.”

“So he has given up the game!” muttered Lord Vargrave; “he was never a practical man—I am glad he is out of the way. But what’s this about myself?”

“We hear that important changes are to take place in the government—it is said that ministers are at last alive to the necessity of strengthening themselves with new talent. Among other appointments confidently spoken of in the best-informed circles, we learn that Lord Vargrave is to have the place of —. It will

be a popular appointment. Lord Vargrave is not a holiday orator, a mere declamatory rhetorician—but a man of clear business-like views, and was highly thought of in the House of Commons. He has also the art of attaching his friends, and his frank manly character cannot fail to have its due effect with the English public. In another column of our journal our readers will see a full report of his excellent maiden speech in the House of Lords on Friday last: the sentiments there expressed do the highest honour to his lordship's patriotism and sagacity."

"Very well, very well indeed!" said Lumley, rubbing his hands; and turning to his letters, his attention was drawn to one with an enormous seal, marked "Private and confidential." He knew before he opened it that it contained the offer of the appointment alluded to in the newspaper. He read, and rose exultantly; passing through the French windows, he joined Lady Vargrave and Evelyn on the lawn, and as he smiled on the mother and caressed the child, the scene and the group made a pleasant picture of English domestic happiness.

Here ends the First Portion of this work: it ends in the view that bounds us when we look on the practical world with the outward unspiritual eye, and see life that dissatisfies justice—for life is so seen but in fragments. The influence of fate seems so small on the man who, in erring, but errs as the egoist, and shapes out of ill some use that can profit himself. But Fate

hangs a shadow so vast on the heart that errs but in venturing abroad, and knows only in others the sources of sorrow and joy.

Go alone, O Maltravers, unfriended, remote—thy present a waste, and thy past life a ruin—go forth to the future! Go, Ferrers, light cynic—with the crowd take thy way—complacent, elated—no cloud upon conscience, for thou seest but sunshine on fortune. Go forth to the Future!

Human life is compared to the circle—Is the simile just? All lines that are drawn from the centre to touch the circumference, by the law of the circle, are equal. But the lines that are drawn from the heart of the man to the verge of his destiny—do they equal each other? Alas! some seem so brief, and some lengthen on as for ever.

END OF THE FIRST PART OF ERNEST MALTRAVERS.

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